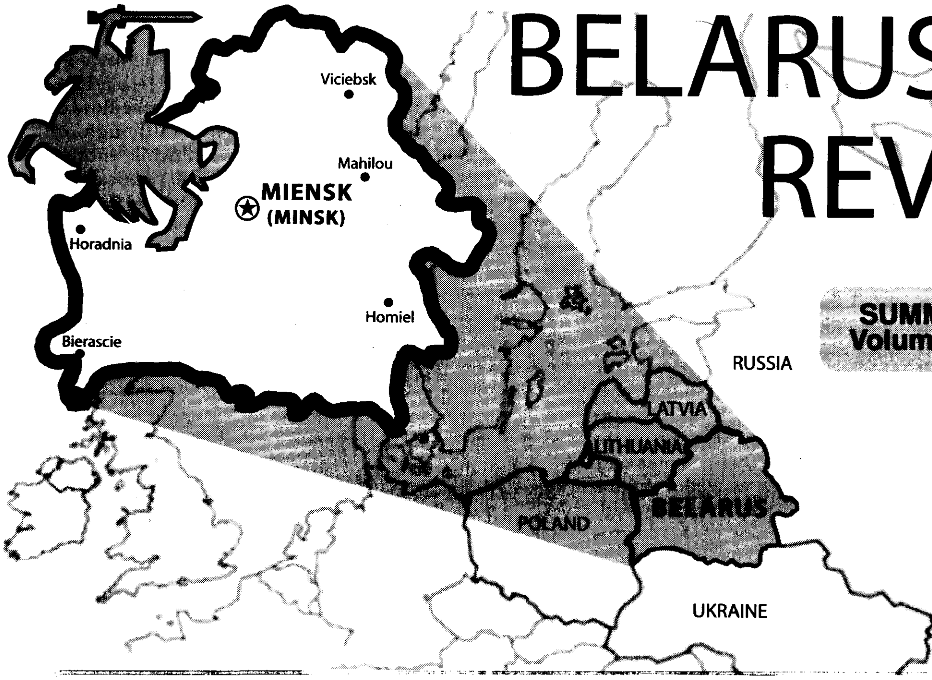
BELARUSIAN REVIEW

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Guest Editorial

:What Next: From the Perspective of the Belarusian-American Community

By Alice A. Kipel

In the latter part of 2004 and into this year, the Belarusian-American community has been making a concerted effort to galvanize its forces to work towards the goal of achieving democracy in Belarus. Members of the community have been heartened by the public statements of President Bush and Secretary Rice, as well as by the increased support from Congress. It was absolutely critical for funds to be added to the rhetoric of the Belarus Democracy Act (BDA), which became law in October of 2004. Under today's repressive regime in Belarus, democratic forces within the country are denied the means to function effectively. Thus, additional monetary support for democracy-building efforts can be vital, even in the most mundane of ways. In addition, however, the appropriation of funds as a follow-up to BDA enactment was necessary so as to counter any possible attack by Belarusian President Lukashenka, to the effect that the BDA is mere words and the United States is not willing to back the words up with deeds. For now, given passage in May of the Emergency Supplemental appropriation for 2005, with its specific earmark for democracy promotion in Belarus, the latter should not be a problem.

However, the broader issue remains — where do we go from here, in the short-term and the long-term. By all accounts, it appears that the current Administration in Washington has every intention of keeping Belarus as one of the main items on its pro-democracy agenda. It is the Belarusian-American community's view that working with the Europeans (both "old" and "new") is critical, and it seems that the community is not alone in this view. Therefore, the hope is to see increasing cooperation between the United States and its European allies in a systematic approach to identifying measures that can be taken to foster a democratic environment in Belarus.

Both the BDA and the Emergency Supplemental appropriation identify three focus areas for the promotion of democracy in Belarus — the development of political parties, civil society and free press/media. However, within both governmental and non-governmental circles, there appear to be "chicken versus egg" views as to prioritization of these three target goals. Undoubtedly, for democracy to succeed, all three are necessary. But, without access to objective information (whether via radio, TV or newspapers), it is difficult for political parties or civil society to flourish to the point of being able to effect change.

Therefore, the Belarusian-American community supports the concept of channeling substantial U.S. and European efforts and assistance funds towards the flow of independent information into Belarus (although, of course, not to the exclusion of other worthwhile efforts). With access to information, civil society and political parties should accordingly be able to develop within Belarus. Furthermore, two of the beauties of channeling assistance dollars into media and press are that accountability can be monitored and the results are measurable -- programs will either air or not, items will either be published or not. With the additional monies just appropriated by Congress, plus cooperation with some European allies, getting accessible media outlets into Belarus can become a reality, reasonably quickly. However, for this to happen, U.S. policy-makers must incorporate such a plan as a concrete part of the democracy agenda.

Naturally, the Belarusian-American community wants this to be a two-way street. The community will gladly do what it can to assist in the U.S. pro-democracy agenda. It is in contact with other ethnic groups and organizations and intends to continue joint and cooperative efforts, particularly with groups with ties to Central and Eastern Europe — Belarus' neighbors. Members of the Belarusian-American community have had many meetings and contacts with members of Congress and their staffs to seek support on items such as the resolution (H. Con. 102) introduced by Representative Chris Smith, urging condemnation of human rights violations in Belarus; for example, Frank Pallone and Rush Holt from New Jersey agreed to co-sponsor the resolution, as did Reps. Berman, Cardin, Faleomavaega, Shimkus, Watson, Waxman and Weiner. On the Senate side, the community has historically received support from Senators Lautenberg and Voinovich, as well as others, such as Senator Biden and his staff. In addition, community members are working to enhance communications and cooperation with American NGOs which are interested in Belarus.

While the Belarusian-American community does not have the means or person-power of some other groups, the community's numbers are larger than most people realize. However, Belarusian-Americans spent the 45 years before 1991 mostly trying to educate other Americans that Belarus exists — a far different task from what lies before us now. Likewise, the U.S. government has had to shift and reshift its emphasis (and may yet need to shift again). Many of the traditional assistance vehicles that the United States has used in Belarus are currently either impracticable or of limited utility — updated pragmatic ideas should accompany the updated policy statements. The Belarusian-American community will heartily applaud such efforts.

Alice A. Kipel is an attorney practicing in the area of international trade law. She represents the Belarusian-American Association in the Central and East European Coalition (CEEC) in Washington, DC.

From the Publisher

Throughout last year the issue of loss of democracy and of diminishing human rights in Belarus has become more prominent. Resolutions are being adopted and specific laws enacted in Washington and Brussels, in Strassburg, Berlin, Warsaw and elsewhere. In Geneva, the mandate of the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Belarus has been extended. Our publication whose aim is to spread objective information about the country, has helped many a researcher, journalist and political leader to become better informed about Belarus. Our thanks go out to all our loyal subscribers and contributors for making it possible. The following were especially generous this year:

Anatol Lukjanczuk, George and Lorraine Kipel, Nicholas Romano, Matthew Smorstok, Thomas Bird, Nicholas Sniezko, Peter Kasaty, Karnela Najdziuk, Irene Kalada Smirnov, Arsien Monid, Anatol Sankovitch, John Shybut, Alla Orsa Romano, Walter Karakulko, Halina Bachar Hajda, Olga Wilson, Jana Branisa Hall. Special thanks go to the BNR Rada which has provided subscriptions to key political leaders worldwide

Some individuals have provided gift subscriptions for their friends and relatives, to local and national political leaders; others to their university libraries; with many providing open contributions.

Future larger contributors will be mentioned in the next issue. If you have not already renewed your subscription, please take time to do so (see the last page for deatils), so *Belarusian Review* can continue to perform its mission of spreading information about Belarus

HISTORICAL DATES

July 7, 1882

Janka Kupala (Ivan Lucevic), a great Belarusian poet, was born in Viazynka, near the town of Maladecna.

Kupala may be considered one of the founders of the modern Belarusian literature, whose patriotic poetry significantly contributed to Belarus' national awakening in the 20th century.

In addition to his literary activities, he was a valuable civic leader ,and the editor of the *Nasa Niva* newspaper in the 1910s.

He died tragically in Moscow in 1942.

July 15, 1410

Anniversary of the **Battle of Grunwald,** one of the biggest in the Middle Ages.

The German Teutonic Knights, with West European mercenaries, were then decisively defeated by an army commanded by the Polish king Jahajla (Jagiello) and Litva's Grand DukeVitaut, supported by Czech Hussite and vassal Tartar contingents.

FEATURES

President Bush and Secretary Rice Push for Democracy In Belarus

By Joe Arciuch

It all started when the US Congress passed the Belarus Democracy Act of 2004 and President George W. Bush signed it into law on October 20, 2004. The purpose of the Act was to promote democracy and human rights in Belarus and to strengthen Belarus' sovereignty and independence. During the signing, the president said the Act would help the cause of freedom in Belarus, would nurture the growth of democratic values and make it possible for Belarus to join the Euro-Atlantic community of democracies.

It is worth mentioning that the heads of states for the US, UK, Russia and Belarus signed a memorandum at the December 1994 summit in Budapest, which assured the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Belarus. Aleksandr Lukashenka of Belarus and Boris Yeltsin of Russia were two of those heads of state who signed the memorandum.

Soon after returning home, those two presidents got busy with a scheme designed to integrate Belarus into the Russian Federation. It took several steps to move the process ahead. In the May 1995 referendum — the first of a series of fraudulent referenda and elections — measures passed that approved the official status of the Russian language (along with Belarusian), economic integration with Russia, and the replacement of national emblems with ones resembling those of the Soviet period. Subsequently, Russian became the dominant language replacing Belarusian within the government and on the street.

The year 1996 became a critical year in US-Belarus relations. In April, a treaty was signed, forming a "Russia-Belarus Community," raising the question of independence and sovereignty of Belarus. With reference to that treaty, the then US Ambassador to Belarus, Kenneth Yalowitz, stated that "The United States supports the sovereignty and independence of the nations of the NIS [New Independent States]. However, as long as integration is voluntary, non-exclusive, promotes economic opportunities, and does not threaten the sovereignty of the participating nations, we do not oppose it."

In November, the last of the 81 mobile ICBMs was transferred to Russia. In the same month, a rigged constitutional referendum was held, which replaced the 1994 constitution and accorded Lukashenka almost dictatorial powers.

Using his new powers, Lukashenka replaced the 1995 democratically elected parliament with his own, a hand - picked one. He also subordinated the judiciary, monopolized the media, marginalized the Belarusian culture and declared war on the democratic opposition.

A new treaty— somewhat watered-down version of the 1996 treaty—was signed in April 1997 and ratified over the summer by the respective parliaments. Over the fol-

lowing years, Union State structures were developed, however a Union State constitution still remains to be finalized, approved by national referenda and ratified by parliaments of both countries. And this has appeared to be the hardest part in the process yet to be accomplished.

The US and the EU did not recognize the new constitution, and with the missiles removed from Belarus the US toughened its position by sharply reducing economic aid (to $10 million in 2004 from $102 million in 1994) and taking a series of political steps aimed at isolating the regime of Belarus. As a result, Belarus practically was left in care of Russia, a country that was not interested in bringing democracy to its neighbor, much less in respecting its independence and sovereignty. It can be argued, this policy actually has helped push Belarus further into the Russian fold. Of course, Russia took full advantage of the situation. In fact, each time Washington would raise the question of human rights abuse or the need to bring freedom and democracy to Belarus, such as proposed in the Belarus Democracy Act of 2004, Russia and Belarus would make noise about speeding up the "Russia-Belarus Union" process.

For the US, the Act was indeed a U-Turn in the direction of its policy toward Belarus. The US Congress made the Administration change its approach from selective to full engagement on the side of furthering democracy in Belarus and towards preservation of the country's independence and sovereignty. **The first shot was fired on January 18 when National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice named Belarus as one of the "outposts of tyranny" countries during the Senate confirmation hearings on her nomination as Secretary of State.**



Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice

Two days later, in his inaugural address, President Bush set a new policy for the United States when he said: **"The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in the entire world."** This, of course, meant Belarus, too.

President Bush, while in Bratislava for a summit with President Putin of Russia, addressed the people assembled in the main square on February 24, telling them of the successes in spreading democracy in Georgia and Ukraine. **"And inevitably, the people of Belarus will someday proudly belong to the community of democracies,"** he added.

Next it was Condoleezza Rice's turn. She set out for a trip to Russia, then to Riga to attend a NATO summit. Here are excerpts from her statements referring to Belarus extracted from the reports posted on the Department of State Website. For complete text, see http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2005/ En Route to Moscow April 19, she was asked about her intended meeting with a Belarusian opposition group in Vilnius, Lithuania.

SECRETARY RICE: Our point is — to Russia is that nobody benefits from the kind of last dictatorship in Europe, which is the Lukashenko government in Belarus. Belarus has been held back by the nature of that regime, it's not possible to integrate it into anything, and the Belarusian people deserve better than that. So this not by any means a zero sum game. A reformed, democratic, prosperous Belarus would probably benefit Russia more than anybody else because of the potential trade relations and economic relations there, not to mention the kinship between the peoples.

On April 20 the Secretary was interviewed by CNN in Moscow:

DOUGHERTY (CNN) : President Bush has made the spread of freedom and democracy the central core of his foreign policy, and already we have seen three revolutions in this part of the world—Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. Is the United States prepared to support revolutions in other parts of the former Soviet Union, specifically in Belarus, or maybe even here in Russia?

SECRETARY RICE: I would hope that, particularly in Belarus, which is really the last remaining true dictatorship in the heart of Europe, that you would begin to see some democratic development. There are organizations there and civil society groups that are crying out for the rest of the world to acknowledge them and to give them a place to make a home so that they can go back and do something for the people of Belarus.

During a press conference held in Vilnius April 20, President Valdas Adamkus of Lithuania, in his introductory remarks, said that in their discussion with the Secretary of State, "... we have touched on a whole range of topical issues, from issues relating to our direct bilateral operation to our common efforts," and **"We also touched on the relations with Russia and Belarus."**

Responding to a follow up question from a correspondent regarding the "efforts to expand the boundaries of democracy towards ... Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, Uzbekistan," the Secretary said: **"...Obviously, Georgia has had a democratic revolution and we continue to work with them. And there are other places where civil society is growing, where opposition forces are speaking out about developments in their society, even in Belarus, which as I said in Russia just a little while ago, is really the last true dictatorship in the center of Europe and it is time for change to come to Belarus."**

At a press conference related to the NATO Ministerial summit held in Vilnius April 21, the Secretary said:

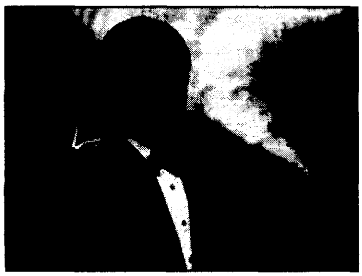
"...Finally, I was very pleased to meet with High Representative Javier Solana and with Foreign Minister of Lithuania Valionis, with several members of civil society of Belarus, we talked about the desire for democratic development in Belarus and what could be done to support those who are trying to make a difference in that very difficult circumstance. "

Responding to a question from Agence France-Press correspondent whether the US is supporting regime change in Belarus and will the US support the demonstration route as opposed to elections that might be neither free nor fair.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, what we talked about was several ways that we could support these efforts in Belarus. The point was made very clearly that the 2006 elections really do present an excellent opportunity for the international community to focus on the need for free and fair elections in Belarus. ...

The groups, who were represented there, talked with Representative Solana and with Foreign Minister Valionis and with me about efforts that they would like to make to unify the civil society movements that are interested in changing Belarus. We did talk about the disappeared in Belarus and the need for there to be an accounting for those people. And the fact that this is something that the entire Belarusian population, undoubtedly, cares about because any number of people has had relatives or friends disappear in this society.

What the United States will always support is the evolution of democratic processes around the world and the desire of people to tap into the aspirations of their populations for freedom. And we will support the idea that elections, when they are held, should be real elections. They should not be sham elections and the international community ought to be prepared and ready to help Belarus to carry out free and fair elections in 2006.


President George W. Bush

In response to an inaudible QUESTION:

SECRETARY RICE: Look, I think that the people of Belarus will have to make their determinations about how they move forward. But the key here is that people ought to be able to protest, to speak their minds, there ought to be free media. We talked about the desire for there to be more independent media and independent voices in Belarus. These are principles that the United States has supported.

In response to a question," Why not encourage the Belarusians now to get out into the streets to protest? Why should they wait for elections?"

SECRETARY RICE: It is not for the United States to tell people how to fulfill their aspirations for freedom. These are the people who are closest to the ground. They are the people who know best the methods that are going to be necessary to make changes in Belarus. What the United States can do, what the European Union can do, what we can do together — and it was really very good to have Javier Solana there today — what we can do together is we can shine a spotlight on places where people are still denied freedom. ...

To tell the Belarusians or anyone else, "You should or must do this," would not be an appropriate role for the United States or for the international community; they will make those judgments. But they can be certain, through sessions like we had today, through the support that they're getting from various funds from the EU and from the United States that people know about the struggle in Belarus and are prepared to support independent voices in that struggle. And the Belarusian government should know that their behavior is being watched by the international community, that this is not a dark corner in which things can go on unobserved, uncommented on, and as if Belarus was somehow not a part of the European continent.

Following are excerpts from President Bush's statements referring to Belarus in conjunction with his trip to Riga, Latvia, on May 6, en route to Moscow to participate on May 9 in the 60th anniversary of the victory over Germany in WW II, and then move on to Georgia. For complete text of his statements, see http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/05/

Prior to his trip, the president was interviewed by Lithuanian State Television in Washington, which was broadcast in Lithuania on May 5. The question and answer follow:

QUESTION: Mr. President, you showed a strong support for democracy cause in Belarus. And what is your administration planning to do, given the fact that Belarus presidential election is planned next year?

PRESIDENT BUSH: Well, first of all, we'll work with you, countries in the neighborhood, countries around — the free countries of the world, to insist there be free elections, and make sure there's free elections. This is the last remaining dictatorship in Europe. And Condi Rice was in the neighborhood recently, as you know, Secretary of State Rice, and she brought up the subject. She met with people who are embracing the freedom movement in Belarus. I did, as well, when I was in Slovakia.

And so one of the roles that the United States can play is to speak clearly about the need for Belarus to be free and to work with people to insist that Belarus be free. And when the elections come, make sure the elections are free, and have monitors and international observers. As you know, that made a big difference in the Ukraine, for example. No, it's — and I think — listen, I believe everybody wants to be free, and I believe if the world works together to achieve that, many people will be free.

Addressing an audience in Riga, Latvia, on May 7, the President said:

PRESIDENT BUSH: ... All of us are committed to the advance of freedom in Belarus. The people of that country live under Europe's last dictatorship, and they deserve better. The governments of Latvia and Lithuania have worked to build support for democracy in Belarus, and to deliver truthful information by radio and newspapers.

Together we have set a firm and confident standard: Repression has no place on this continent. The people of Minsk deserve the same freedom you have in Tallinn, and Vilnius, and Riga. ...

I also want to thank you for your hard work in helping democracy spread in the neighborhood. We had a really good discussion today about Belarus. We talked about Ukraine and Georgia and Moldova. We talked about Russia and the relationship between the Baltics and Russia.

In a follow up question from Lithuanian Television that "...can there be a deal between Washington and Moscow whereby Russia would make sure that President Lukashenko is not reelected next year, and in return, Washington would encourage, or would hail the democracy there, but turn a blind eye on the continued Russia's influence there? Or are you prepared to go all the way?"

PRESIDENT BUSH: No, that's an interesting question, can you make a deal to determine somebody else's fate. I think that's what we're lamenting here today, about what happened to the Baltics — you know, kind of one of those secret deals amongst large powers that consigns people to a way of government. No, we don't make secret deals. The only deal that I think is a necessary deal for people is the deal of freedom. They should be allowed to express themselves in free and open and fair elections in Belarus.... And so I will continue to speak as clearly as I can to President Putin that it's in his country's interests that there be democracies on his borders. I mean, after all, look at the three nations here. These are peaceful, prosperous nations that are good neighbors with Russia, and good neighbors with each other and good neighbors elsewhere, as well.

Addressing the International Republican Institute (IRI) at a dinner May 18, President Bush praised the Institute's work in spreading democracy all over the world and said "...**With the help of IRI, Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia are working to -- with civil society leaders in Belarus to bring freedom to Europe's last dictatorship."**

Reaction included praise from the opposition in Belarus, a rather restrained response from the Russian government and a condemnation from the Belarusian government, followed by a lot of speculation from Russian analysts about the importance of Belarus to Russia and the need for integrating it into a "united country." The immediate objective of the US is to influence the outcome of the 2006 presidential elections in Belarus. It is obvious that the US and Russia have their differences over Belarus and they would have to resolve them to make democracy succeed.

QUOTES of QUARTER

"If, in exchange for Belarus, Moscow would promise Lukashenka to be a successor in the Kremlin after another seven-year Putin term, Lukashenka would hand over Belarus without a backward glance."

Pavel Felgenhauer, Voice of America, April 21, 2005.

Is Belarus a Dictatorship?

By David Marples

Several recent events have brought the Republic of Belarus close to a dictatorship, a term used rather freely to describe the administration of President Alexander Lukashenka, but hitherto incorrectly. Over the past eleven years, despite the heavy hand of the authorities, there have remained important outlets for the opposition, such as newspapers, press agencies, and informal associations, as well as some basic civil rights. These now appear to be disappearing as part of a well-coordinated government campaign to close various loopholes that have permitted an opposition to survive. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has listed Belarus as an "outpost of tyranny," and describes it as the "last dictatorship in Europe." Her concern seems entirely warranted.

In mid-May, a revised version of the law "On the organs of state security" was adopted, modifying the original law of December 1997, following the approval of a new draft law by the House of Representatives and Council of the Republic in April. The new law gives KGB officials the right to enter any house or apartment without prior permission, even if they damage a lock in so doing. They must then report to the State Procurator within 24 hours. The KGB also has the right to tap telephone conversations and infiltrate enterprises as regular workers. The secret police also has authority to use the forces and organs of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defense, the Ministry of Emergency Situations, and the State Committee of Frontier Troops.

According to Professor Mikhail Pastukhou, a former teacher at the Institute of National Security, "Some amendments to the law on organs of state security seriously encroach on the personal rights and freedoms of the citizens stipulated in the Constitution," particularly the right of the inviolability of the home, one's personal life, and one's personal correspondence.

Over the past decade, most non-government newspapers have been shut down or forced to close as a result of heavy fines. The last major independent newspaper to survive in Belarus is *Narodnaya Volya* (circulation 30,000), a bilingual Belarusian-Russian newspaper, usually sold in the subterranean passageways that frequent the central part of Minsk. Last month, however, it received its second warning of the year, which is sufficient for the authorities to instigate measures for closure. It stands accused of issuing false information by listing the names of five non-consenting people under the manifesto of the opposition movement Will of the People, which was founded in February. The leader of the group, Alyaksandr Kazulin, maintains that pressure from the authorities may have forced the five people to revoke their signatures.

In April, leader of the pro-Lukashenka Belarusian Liberal-Democratic Party, Syarhey Haidukevich sued the paper for the sum of $93,000 for moral damage resulting from a report that there were commercial ties between his party and the former regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Such a sum would bring the newspaper close to bankruptcy if the

suit is successful. Meanwhile, a reporter for *Narodnaya Volya*, Volha Klasouskaya, was expelled from the School of Journalism at Belarusian State University, ostensibly for her poor progress in her academic studies, but more likely because of her complaint about the brutality of the militia following its attack on the March 25 demonstrators in Minsk.

Attacks on opposition leaders have intensified. On May 25, Mikola Statkevich, leader of the unregistered branch of the Social Democratic Party, received a 10-day prison sentence for showing disrespect to the court, following his detention after a protest against the referendum and parliamentary elections last year. On May 31, he and Pavel Sevyarynets, leader of the unregistered Youth Front (formerly affiliated with the Belarusian Popular Front) received sentences of three years of hard labor for violating Article 342 of the Criminal Code — the organization of group activities that violate civic order or active participation in them — a sentence criticized sharply by the US Department of State.

Other leading opposition figures have also been targeted. Journalist Maryna Bahdanovich, an activist of the United Civic Party, was fined 200 basic salaries (US$2,200) for participating in an "unapproved" protest by private traders on March 1. On April 28, court officials visited her apartment and expropriated property worth around US$300. However, by then Bahdanovich was then detained again for participating in the Chernobyl anniversary and was informed on June 1 that further property would be taken from her. Syarhey Skrabets, one of the former leaders of the Respublika faction in the pre-2004 Parliament, has been accused of trying to bribe officials at the Office of the Procurator in Brest Oblast, a familiar means of persecution of opposition leaders.

Not a single opposition leader has remained free from arrest, assault, or other forms of persecution. As the opposition tries to come up with a means of selecting a single candidate to face Lukashenka in the presidential election next year, one can anticipate that such attacks will continue. To such repressive acts must be added the closure last year of Belarus's only independent university, increasing pressure on academics and students to support the government on pain of dismissal, the closure of the country's only independent source of sociological surveys, the National Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies, and a growing list of political prisoners that includes scientist, Yuri Bandazheuski, former ambassador to the Baltic States, Mikhail Marynich, businessman and former deputy to the Parliament of the 13th Session, Andrey Klimau, and leader of the public association 'Free Belarus', Valery Levaneuski.

In a bizarre twist, following the renaming of the two main streets of Minsk from the names Masherau and Skaryna to Avenue of the Victors and Independence Avenue respectively, OMON troops could be seen ripping up portraits of the former Communist Party leader Piotr Masherau, once a hero for Lukashenka but now evidently perceived as a rival influence. One source commented that the president had become irked that his journey from his residence in Drazdy to central Minsk each morning took him down the Prospekt named for an earlier leader. Avenue of the Victors would thus allow people to reflect on Lukashenka instead.

The dictatorship is beginning to take shape, and the president emphasizes — in the light of regime or government changes in recent times in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan — that there will be no "colored revolutions" in his country.

An earlier version of this article was published by the Eurasian Daily Monitor (Jamestown Foundation) in Washington, D.C. It has been modified for Belarusian Review.

The First Declaration of Belarusian Independence

By Mikalaj Packajeu

This year marks the 87th anniversary of the proclamation of the statehood of independent Belarus — the Belarusian Democratic Republic, or in Belarusian — Bielaruskaja Narodnaja Respublika (BNR). It took place in Minsk on March 25, 1918 — a date believed by many to mark the most important event in Belarusian history in the 20th century. This event is important not only historically, but is also of major political significance for Belarus today, and for the foreseeable future.

First, the article will address the context of the proclamation and the brief existence of the Belarusian Democratic Republic's Rada (a pre-parliament) and government in Belarus.

Second, it will show that Lenin's government agreed to recognize even symbolic autonomy for Belarus only as a reaction to the non-communist Belarusian statehood.

Third, it will emphasize the political significance of the establishment of the Belarusian Democratic Republic (BNR) in 1918, and the significance of the later activities of its government and Rada BNR in exile.

According to the official view promoted in the Soviet Union, which, by the way, is the official line in the Republic of Belarus under Lukashenka, as well as in contemporary Russia — the proclamation of the Belarusian Democratic Republic was just an insignificant incident hardly worth mentioning. The present regime of the Republic of Belarus does not perceive any relation to the Republic of 1918, and in 1995 it even repudiated the newly restored state symbols of the BNR; just a year after Lukashenka came to power. On the other hand, the 25th of March remains the Independence Day not only for the Belarusian diaspora in the free world, but also for the pro-democracy forces in Belarus.

Speaking of the Belarusian Democratic Republic (**Editor's note**: it is abbreviated as BNR in accordance with the original Belarusian), what is important to stress is the difference between how little it was able to achieve then, and what the BNR, in fact, had accomplished in the long run. The Belarusian Democratic Republic was proclaimed in the context of the First World War, using the opportunity of one occupation coming to an end, and another not

having yet arrived. Unfortunately for BNR, the Germans, who had occupied a large part of Belarus during the war, remained loyal to the treaty they had concluded with Soviet Russia at Brest and thus prevented the BNR from creating a functioning nation-wide structure of state authorities, or from borrowing sufficient funds internationally to get the new state going. More importantly, the Germans blocked any attempt to create BNR armed forces that would have been able to defend the fledgling state. This not only left the BNR defenseless against the Red Army but it also dramatically devalued BNR's importance in concluding defensive alliances with neighbors against the Red Army's drive westward. As the then Polish military leader, Marshal Josef Pilsudski, explained in 1920, he terminated any relations with BNR officials, since "in the military sense of the word, Belarusians are zero." Similarly when a BNR envoy in Paris sought the support of the western Entente for an independent Belarus, the only question he was asked was — how many divisions do you have at your disposal?

It is hard to see how the BNR could have had any immediate success in the context where no amount of democratic legitimacy mattered — quite simply "the power flowed from guns." However, the story of the BNR also proves that political actions, virtually deprived of immediate significance by the circumstances at the time, might by the very interplay of those same circumstances, have had great long term political implication. In the longer term, the BNR, by its brief existence in Belarus and later by the actions of its leadership in exile, secured the very idea of a Belarusian nation state. These were the concrete results of those actions :

BNR laid the foundations for the major national institutions.

◦ **the Belarus question was put on the international agenda** – to start with in regional politics, and later, though marginally, even at the peace conference in Versailles and in the League of Nations;

◦ **it provided political basis for Belarusians on the Soviet side to demand recognition of Belarusian autonomy.** This demand resulted in the proclamation of a Soviet Belarusian Republic in January of 1919.

◦ **BNR laid the foundations for the major national institutions** — later taken over and developed under the Soviet regime — functioned as a catalyst for the official policy of "Belarusization" during most of the 1920s.

Although the Belarusian Democratic Republic managed to secure recognition of its statehood de-jure or de-facto only from a small number of the newly formed Central and Eastern European states, the significance of the fact that it put Belarusian statehood on the agenda of regional politics, cannot be underestimated. The Bolsheviks initially simply considered the territory of Belarus to be an integral part of Soviet Russia, thus they had no plans for recognizing any distinct form of statehood or self-governance for Belarus at all. It was only the creation of the BNR in an area outside of Soviet control that gave to Belarusians on the Communist side the appropriate standing to demand the creation of an autonomous Belarus Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) — in federation with Soviet Russia — which, in Bolshevik terms would serve as a counter-action against "bourgeois" independent Belarusian statehood.

This is evident from the official Bolshevik publications of the time. I quote here from a documentary sketch by Auhien Kalubovich: "The Fathers of the BSSR and their Fate" (Cleveland, 1982). As early as in December 1918 *Zapadnaja Kommuna* newspaper - the official publication of Communist authorities for the territory of Belarus which was based in Smolensk — explained: "Why do we need those games — Soviet republics?... It is clear to us that the Soviet power sees its task ... not in causing national separateness in the framework of small nation states, but in the destruction of all national barriers... The proclamation of a Soviet Republic of Belarus would not only fail serve the interests of the struggle against nationalistic tendencies of petty bourgeoisie, but would, on the contrary, create space for such tendencies. And this is not in the interest of the socialist revolution. What we permit as acceptable in one location because of tactical considerations, should not be transferred to other locations — where such considerations do not and can not exist."

The motivation of Moscow to proceed soon afterward with the proclamation of the BSSR was explained by the local leader of Bolsheviks, A. Miasnikou, at the 1st Congress of the Communist Party of Belarus: he said it was necessary to confront "bourgeois self-determination" by a Soviet-based "self-determination": "We need an antidote against Entente initiatives", something that could be used to block the way by which the "forces of the black international" might act against the Soviet Russia. Another communist official at the time similarly explained that the BSSR was a tactical move to counteract President Wilson's slogan regarding national self-determination of peoples. In September 1919, V. Knoryn, another Bolshevik leader in Belarus, explained in the *Zvyazda* newspaper: "The motives of the Communist party... for its decision, were of a purely international nature."

In early February 1919 the official Soviet newspaper *Zvyazda* elaborated why the Belarus Soviet authorities had still not fully merged Belarus with Russia: "For this there were very important reasons of an international nature. The question facing Belarus is - how can it be more useful...: whether existing as a separate republic or merged with the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic. And upon a mature and comprehensive discussion of this question... political wisdom tells us that for the time being we [Soviet authorities in Belarus] should exist separately." But, then the paper continues, "the Congress also confirmed that efforts of the Belarusian nationalist intelligentsia to create an 'own' Belarusian language, 'own' national culture, are futile.... Let Belarusian writers take good note of this."

Just 16 days after the proclamation of the BSSR, Moscow decided to detach the provinces of Vitsebsk, Mahilou and Smolensk and 4 districts of Charnihau province, from

the BSSR territory and annex them to Russia. At the same time Moscow ordered the leadership of the BSSR, now consisting only of the provinces of Minsk and Hrodna, to pass a resolution to merge with a similar Soviet Republic of Lithuania. So, after less than 2 months, the BSSR ceased to exist, and the new (and also short-lived) Belarus-Lithuania Soviet republic formed without any Belarusians in its leadership. One may remark that the BNR government actually lasted in Minsk significantly longer than the phantom Soviet Belarusian Republic. In the summer of 1920, when the Bolsheviks, still fighting a war against Poland on the one hand and against the local Belarusian insurgents and partisans (often acting under the BNR loyalist slogans) on the other — decided to re-create a smaller version BSSR, consisting initially of just six counties of the Minsk province.

Thus, the BSSR was a communist *reaction to* the BNR - and it is to the international circumstances named that the BSSR owed its very existence. The BSSR was a foreign policy tool for the Bolsheviks, who then merged it with a similar Soviet republic they created in the Red-army occupied part of today's Lithuania. Even though the BNR government now could act only in exile, the very persistence of the BNR on the international stage, impelled Moscow to re-constitute the smaller BSSR in the Belarusian territory under its control. The Riga peace treaty between Soviet Russia and Poland - divided the Belarusian Democratic Republic's territory between the two countries until 1939.

Pro-Western forces in Belarus associate themselves with BNR principles and tradition.

It is also worthwhile mentioning that during its brief existence in Belarus, the BNR founded the national institutions that were key to nation's later development, the outstanding among them — the Belarusian State University. These projects were taken over and developed by communists, who had little imagination of their own, but in any case wanted to counter non-Soviet Belarusian national projects. In turn these institutions, together with the fact that the BNR remained a foreign policy factor for the USSR during the 1920s, were instrumental for launching the policy of "Belarusization" in Soviet Belarus at that time.

The present day Republic of Belarus is therefore a clear, albeit an indirect consequence of the BNR. Its origins are traceable unambiguously to the BSSR. Even more important than its political genealogy is the fact that it also displays a clear succession in its political nature from that USSR constituent republic. The present regime, in effect, is the political successor of the authorities imposed by Red Army's invasion in 1919-1921 and, as such, still wages war today against the very memory of BNR.

Today, on the other hand, the Executive Council of the BNR Rada is the last from among the historic governments-in-exile of the Soviet era. All other similar entities have officially handed over their authority to the governments ruling in their respective nation states, (although some Ukrainians until very recently, regretted this fact, saying that in their case it was perhaps premature!). In fact, today the aim of the BNR Rada — and it is its Executive Council that functions in the limited capacity of a government in exile — is not a return to power in Belarus. On the contrary, its aim is simply to maintain the political, institutional and statehood succession from the BNR — in order to pass it on to a duly constituted authority in Belarus – as soon as one exists that could properly and legitimately receive that succession. At present, in practical terms this means actively working to create conditions and assist in the establishment of such an authority in Belarus in whatever manner possible.

In the early 1990s, the Belarus Minister of Foreign Affairs Piotr Krauchanka, sought to secure from the exiled BNR leadership the surrender of its historical mandate. However, the proposal seemed dubious even at the time, since Krauchanka, a former high level Soviet functionary, was working to draw Belarus into a military union with Russia. Later developments made such a step clearly impossible. The present position of the BNR remains that the current regime of the Republic of Belarus cannot be regarded as genuinely representing Belarusian national statehood, in its content, identity, policies and behavior.

Significantly, after all these years, the Belarusian Democratic Republic remains a political factor for Belarus. In fact, the democratic and national movements in Belarus do indeed regard the principles of 25th of March 1918 as fundamental to their ideal of a Belarusian statehood. Every year in Belarus the Belarusian public celebrates March 25th as a national holiday - despite state repression. Another indication of the BNR's significance was seen a few years ago, when there was a public campaign in Belarus, registering Belarusians for "BNR citizenship." Currently, Belarusian pro-democracy and pro-independence political parties hold meetings and consultations with the representatives of the BNR Rada. One such meeting was recently held in United States. Hence, the BNR Rada is implicitly recognized by a broad range of political and civic organizations in Belarus as having political, or politically relevant, authority of a significant, though undefined nature.

The desire of the pro-democracy, pro-independence, and pro-Western forces in Belarus is to associate themselves with the BNR principles and tradition. The desire to reconstitute Belarus as a clearly non-Soviet state, to see the country's future in the community of nations of Europe, fully corresponds with the aims of BNR Rada. Such was the aim of BNR Rada's work in exile long before Belarusian revival emerged in the late 1980s. When required, the BNR Rada will be ready, willing and able to render concrete institutional forms for a legitimate political succession to a democratic government in Belarus. In a free and democratic Belarus, the 25th of March will undoubtedly be its Independence Day.

The Executive Council of the Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic (BNR Rada) recently adopted the following declaration:

- **BNR Rada declares its support for the hunger striking students in the city of Zhodzina who were dismissed from educational institutions for participating in oppositional activities;**
- **BNR Rada also condemns the imprisonment, because of their political activity, of Mikola Statkevich, Paval Sevyarynets and other political prisoners;**
- **BNR Rada expresses its indignation regarding President Lukashenka's decree prohibiting the use by non-governmental organizations (including newspapers) of terms 'Belarusian' or 'National' in their names.**

New York, June 4, 2005

15th World Press Freedom Day

President Lukashenka's authoritarian regime tightened its grip in 2004, substantially reducing freedom of all kinds, including a systematic crackdown on the independent press. The information minister used bogus bureaucratic reasons to suspend a dozen newspapers in the run-up to parliamentary elections and a referendum on 17 October. The independent press is fighting to survive and is overshadowed by government media that mostly spouts propaganda.

Two personal accounts vividly illustrate the desperate situation in Belarus.

Andrei Shantarovich edits the weekly *Mestnaya Gazeta* in the town of Vaukavysk. It is one of the few independent and privately-owned publications in Belarus. He staged a 21-day hunger strike in October 2004 after the paper was suspended by the authorities.

Why did you go on hunger strike?

I wanted to protest against the paper's suspension, which I was told about by the information ministry on 14 October. It came just three days before the referendum allowing President Alexander Lukashenka to stay in power. So I began the hunger strike. The worst of it was that I was fined about $500 on 25 November for supposedly organizing a demonstration without permission from the Vaukavysk regional authorities. But all I'd done was to go on a hunger strike. My lawyer argued in vain that I hadn't provoked the public., hadn't roamed the streets proclaiming my opinion and that it was just a personal gesture. The fine was (intended) to scare me and make me shut down the paper for good.

Why did they suspend the paper ?

The information ministry cancelled my publication for a bogus reason - because the paper didn't have a legal address in Vaukavysk. The reason it didn't was because the authorities had refused to register it. So the paper hasn't appeared for the past month.

It clearly disturbs people. It has a circulation of more than 8,000, a lot for a town of only 140,000 people. It's a "dissident" paper that provides readers with reliable news about things the pro-government media just doesn't mention. No printer in Belarus will handle it, so I get it printed in Smolensk, which is 800 km. away, in Russia.

Did the hunger strike achieve anything ?

It was important for me to protest the regime's deliberate destruction of press freedom. Independent newspapers are being closed all the time. Fines and bureaucratic harassment are all part of a plan to stifle dissent and stop it from being published and spread. We now have a tame media that just says everything is fine in Belarus. It's Lukashenka's famous "vertical administration" system and it's worse that under Soviet rule. The authorities conjure up a new law every day to stifle independent voices.

December 2004

Zhanna Litvina is the president of the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ), which won the European Parliament's 2004 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, encouraging it in the battle for press freedom.

What did being presented with the Sakharov Prize in December mean to you ?

Two Belarusian organizations, we and Zubr, were shortlisted for it so it means we're recognized by all the European Union's democratic forces. It's big international publicity for BAJ and powerful support for all my colleagues who've been fighting for a free media over the last decade. The prize reassures us we aren't alone in the battle in a country cut off from outside world.

How are you going to use the 50,000 euros prize money?

If we're allowed in the end to use it — it depends on various government bodies — we're going to set up independent facilities to print and distribute existing independent publications and also open a journalism school to teach worldwide journalistic principles. The next meeting will make the final decision.

Is a media "revolution" possible any time in Belarus, like the one that happened between the two rounds of Ukraine's presidential election ?

Definitely not. The regime's grip on the media is tightening. All independent voices are systematically hounded by absurd bureaucratic devices. A score of publications have been suspended since the beginning of 2004. Several alternative papers, such as *Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta* and *Salidarnasc*, are forced to print abroad, in Smolensk. So the independent press is shrinking.

Journalists have a big problems getting news. Those granted accreditation are mainly the ones who follow the official line and put out propaganda. The regime sees the media's job as simply to echo government views.

Is the mysterious murder of journalist Dmitri Zavadski in 2000 going to be forgotten?

The BAJ is campaigning for a new investigation. The regime certainly isn't doing much to solve the case, to say the least.

December 2004.

BELARUS' FORUM

The Frozen Country, Or The War Of Generations - Belarusian-style

By Vasil Auramienka

The generation of those who are today in their fifties is shirking their historical mission.

It is along this age-line "where time has frozen," say those who look back after having been absent from Belarus for 15 years.

Today's Belarusian society may be divided into three general layers. The first one consists of the incorrigibly Soviet people: the older generation and representatives of present authorities (regardless of age) - headed by Lukashenka himself. The second one is made up of "corrupted" Soviet people - mainly the middle-aged generation that spent their formative years in the Soviet era, but managed to gulp large helpings of perestroika, nationalism and other freethinking ideas in the early 1990s. And the third group are the young who learned about the Soviets from their older friends or the school textbooks.

"We are very satisfied with our lives, and especially with our president," state the retirees.

"How and to where are we to flee from this kind of shabbiness ?" - think most young people. Some don't think, they just act. A 19 year-old girl goes to borrow money from her retired neighbor; not having received any, she hit the old woman in the head, killing her. Two young adolescents broke into the house of their village neighbors, helped themselves to two pensions (almost half a million rubles!), killed the old women and set fire to their house. Unintentional manslaughter? Accidental occurrence? Yet such "accidents" are becoming increasingly frequent in the villages and small towns within the "quiet swamps." The young rise against the old.

There are no work opportunities for the young and the parents are themselves unemployed or barely making ends meet. To flee abroad or just to get out the village physically or mentally they need money - and there it is - right next door, guarded by feeble, defenseless but "wealthy" retirees with 200 thousand-rubles pensions. This translates to escape: 100 bottles of cheap wine! Here is the temptation for the new Raskolnikovs

...The main problem lies in the following: in the last ten years the "incorrigibles" have monopolized not only the authority, but also the system of public communication. As a result the developmental potential of other social groups is blocked, the couhntry is "frozen." The most serious conflict, if not complete lack of understanding exists between the generation churned in the industrial belly of the Soviet empire, and the very young Belarusians, seduced and mesmerized by computers and sweet dreams of a consumer society. But they were only shown the fruit, not allowed to get hold of them. Instead of letting them enter the fast lane on the highway to happiness they were driven to the collective farm stall. Of course, sooner or later this will lead to a crisis of epic proportions.

There exists, however, a way to delay this moment - by constantly pushing out the most active and thinking individuals abroad. For the "normals," who cannot contain their anger and envy of the old "moneybags", there exists the criminal code and prison cells. This way out is not the best either; it simply means a dead end.

Nevertheless, the main vector of the country's social policies is intended for the retirees to continue sponsoring their children and grandchildren, who are healthy but unemployed or earn a little more than unemployed. This simply leads to a confrontation between generations, caused not only by difference in world outlooks, but also in material well-being. The young want to but are not able; the old do not want to, yet nevertheless are able to exert an influence on authorities and the overall situation.

The life expectancy of the old is another 5-10 years. Following the passage of this time there may follow a complete break of the eras and the implosion of the ideological, economic and political foundations of today's system. The example of the our neighbors and logic of Europe,s overall development prove that such process is inevitable.

You may ask: what about the middle-age generation ? The main trouble is that my generation, fifty years old today, has failed to realize its historical mission. We did not become the bridge between the Soviet era, where we spent the first half of our lives, and the democratic, or rather post-industrial society, associated with today's Europe and other world,s leading nations. At first we were too preoccupied by the blame game and the invective. Later we became historical archaeologists — sifting through the Soviet past to understand the present and near future. Just as the older generation remained forever bruised by the Great Patriotic War, our generation was affected by communism. Actually most of our energy was spent in destroying the communist legacy, in cleansing ourselves of "pink" stains. [Reminds this editor of the story within the children,s book: The Cat in the Hat Comes Back, by Dr. Seuss.] Often it was a vain effort, yet it contained some enjoyment. The Belarusian suffered for a long time, and consequently became somewhat of a masochist, who enjoys scratching one's own scars in order to feel pain once more. The masochistic sentiments from the last century appear today not only in poetry or newspaper articles, but even in politics itself.

It wouldn't be fair not to mention the nation-building process, to which many of my contemporaries devoted so much energy. True, the result of their efforts leaves certainly much to be desired. The fact that in the fields of economic and especially political reform movement has been even less noticeable, serves as a weak excuse. These processes seem to be closely interconnected, but among them economics is the primary one. Here I agree with Marxists - an empty stomach and pocket make the best instructors and agitators. As long as one half of our citizens earns enough not to starve, and the other one enough not to dem-

onstrate in the streets, there will be no revolution. There will be a quiet war and growing hate by the young "hot bloods" for the "old farts, who 'don't let us lead normal lives.'" All along there will be the official concealment of the real social conflicts.

In this situation it is very important not to surrender to the system, not to lower oneself to its level, not to degrade along with it - neither morally nor mentally. If, for instance, the day after tomorrow the monster collapsed, are we going to find enough interesting ideas and people, prepared to rise above the level of say, Lukashenka's plan for reviving the collective farm.?

In my opinion, our main task is fostering intellectual self-development, as well as the professional and personal preparation for the post-authoritarian era. It certainly makes sense to create a bank of ideas and projects in various spheres of activity ˜ not only in economics but also in education, health insurance, retirement planning, ecology and modern information technology. Otherwise today's tongue-tied notables will be succeeded by a new generation, that is "ours" but that is every bit as pitiful. The result of such a revival and democratization won't be any better than the previous results. History, literature and arts are OK and will always be needed, yet now it isn't enough anymore. The Belarusian Independence idea must focus also on other spheres.

Unfortunately, there are no favorable conditions for such efforts, and there might not be any in the future. We have to use whatever is available. We should also work through the third sector, local government and informal contacts. The 12 years that, according to some, were lost, represent a delay offered by history— before the start in the new age. Let everyone look back to recognize what he lost and gained during this period. Where are we today? Are we ready to start again, or is it better to leave this mission to the younger generation? Shall we, the lost generation of the 1990s still be able to have our say in contemporary Belarusian history and finally realize the mission given us by fate?

The age of false starts and formulaic remedies is over.

Source: *Nasa Niva*, May 20, 2005

Translated from Belarusian by George Stankevich

QUOTES of QUARTER

"Lukashenka is not the worst misfortune for our country. The worst misfortune is the unwillingness to live better."

Belarusian opposition politician **Andrey Klimau**; quoted by RFE/RL's Belarus Service on April 22, 2005.

"Our 'Rose Revolution' has inspired patriots of Ukraine and resulted in the revolution in this country. Freedom fighters in Belarus are inspired by our example."

Mikhail Saakashvili, President of Georgia, Tbilisi, May 26, 2005.

Ten Years of Uninterrupted Struggle

An Appeal by the Belarusian Language Society

On May 14, 1995 the Republic of Belarus held a referendum on the issue of the equality of official status for the Belarusian and Russian languages. This referendum was flawed and violated existing laws.

According to information provided by the Central Election Commission, the measure passed by a majority.

Those who voted "for," were gullible in their assumption that everything would then be equal. For example, it was assumed that at least half of students in all schools and universities will be educated in their mother tongue; half of Belarusian TV channels will broadcast only in Belarusian and, official newspapers will publish half of their articles in the co-official Belarusian language.

What really resulted was the total russification in all spheres of cultural, civic and political life of an independent country. The number of students attending Belarusian-language schools and classes declined from 616,614 (40.7% of the total) in the years 1994-95 to 301,250 (23.8%) in 2004-2005. Even the primary channel of Belarusian TV switched to Russian.

However, the Belarusian people, who have survived many waves of polonization and russification, did not give in this time either. According to the 1999 census 73.6% of Belarus, citizens referred to Belarusian as their native language, and almost 37% use it in their daily life. Last year, the majority of young people chose Belarusian language for taking school acceptance tests.

The people began feeling nostalgia for the native word. The image of our language has changed. It is spoken not only in the countryside, but also by the nation's elite, highly educated people, nationally conscious city dwellers. Foreign embassies, radio stations and advertisers began using Belarusian.

We appeal to all citizens of our country to give preference to the Belarusian word, and use it always and everywhere. Use Belarusian when filling out Russian-language forms in banks, post offices and other institutions. Use Belarusian to write your entries in the public books of suggestions and remarks.

Use your language in your daily life and appreciate all who do. Write warm words of gratitude to the manufacturers who use Belarusian on their product labels, to the communication ministry for issuing tasteful postcards with Belarusian-language text, to the priests and ministers who address their people in Belarusian. Your smile and good word will strengthen the use of native language in our country.

Source: *Nasha Slova*, May 4, 2005

Translated from Belarusian by George Stankevich

Statements by the Belarusian Popular Front Party (BPF) Sojm

1. Appeal by the Sojm of the BPF Party to partner political parties, to governments of democratic states and the international community.
Miensk, 14 May 2005.

For several months now the Lukashenka regime — while continuing to lose support not only among the ordinary citizens of our country but also within the 'vertical' of power it itself created — has been trying, by whatever means it could, to put an end to the activities of all the organizations it does not control. Above all this applies to those continuing to defend the values of democracy and to struggle for the freedom of the Belarusian people. This year the BPF Party, which came into existence right back in the Soviet times — the oldest Belarusian political organization and the most consistent in standing for democratic freedoms and the country's independence — has found itself under threat of destruction. Within a single month, the authorities first liquidated more than 75 of its local organisational structures all over the country (the happened also to other democratic parties in Belarus, our partners). Then the authorities issued an ultimatum demand to the party's governing bodies to vacate their office premises in the centre of Miensk — where the headquarters of the Belarusian Popular Front has been located since 1992 — by May 15 this year. These actions of the authorities indicate all too clearly that a decision on banning the BPF Party is being prepared.

In connection with the aforesaid facts we declare that the BPF Party will continue to exist under any conditions. Depriving us of office premises and banning the party will not stop our struggle for freedom, independence and a better life for the Belarusian people. We address our partner political parties, governments of democratic states and the international community with an appeal to render support to the BPF Party via all the international institutions, demanding an end to the destruction of political parties and the persecution of political opponents of the regime in Belarus. The truth is on our side. We shall prevail. Long live Belarus!

2. A New "Holy Alliance"
Statement by the Sojm of the BPF Party
Miensk, 14 May 2005

Recently, in his annual address to the National Assembly and the people of Belarus Lukashenka openly declared that he would not allow 'a change of the ruling elite in a democratic way'.

This position — as also the categorical refusal to accept the 'colored' peaceful popular revolutions in the post-Soviet area — is also shared by the leadership of the Russian Federation. Nikolai Patrushev, the chief of the Russian secret services, has appeared as the person most consistently alike to the last dictator of Europe. In his speech before members of the Russian Duma, he (Patrushev) drew back the veil of secrecy surrounding the activities of some post-Soviet states' secret services.

According to Patrushev, at the meeting in Bratislava democratic 'conspirators' from Belarus developed a blueprint for deposing Lukashenka. Confusing truth with fiction, Patrushev described projects for recruiting Ukrainian 'orange functionaries' to prepare a 'velvet revolution' in Belarus. He also accused foreign foundations which finance educational programmes in our country and 'gather information' in the Commonwealth of Independent States area. According to his gendarme's logic, the Belarusian people is not entitled to education and to receiving independent information, nor, moreover to conducting honest, open, unfalsified elections — but instead, it follows, it must reconcile itself forever to the regime of the present 'ruling elite'.

Patrushev spoke of the co-operation of the CIS countries' special services in countering the revolutionary wave. It is hard to imagine a more open declaration of imperial chauvinist ideology. This conspiracy of secret services headed by the Russian Federal Security Service constitutes an organised form of political reaction in the post-Soviet area.

The Sojm of the BPF Party decisively protests against the meddling of the Russian Federation's secret services into the internal affairs of independent Belarus and demands that the government of Belarus should provide the Belarusian people with prompt and accurate information on this new Holy Alliance of reactionary government in the CIS.

CHORNOBYL LEGACY

Commemorating The Chornobyl Disaster

By Valentinas Mite

People in Ukraine, Belarus, and other countries on 26 April commemorate the 19th anniversary of the Chornobyl nuclear disaster. In the early hours of 26 April 1986, a massive chemical explosion blew the 1,000-ton cover off the top of Chornobyl's Unit Four reactor, spewing radiation over Ukraine, Belarus, and northern Europe. Millions of people were affected by the disaster north of Kyiv.

Ukraine and Belarus, the most affected countries, still wrangle with dire consequences of the Chornobyl nuclear disaster.

Though the world's worst civil nuclear accident happened in Ukraine, its biggest victim was arguably neighboring Belarus.

Given the prevailing winds, some 70 percent of Chornobyl's radioactive fallout landed on Belarus, contaminating one-third of its territory. One and a half million people — including 420,000 children — were located in the polluted area.

Valery Karbalevich of Strategy, a political-analysis center in Minsk, says the anniversary of the disaster is becoming routine: President Alyaksandr Lukashenka visits the

affected regions, while the opposition remembers the disaster and uses the occasion to criticize the government.

"Today [26 April], the opposition invited people to go to the building of the presidential administration and leave petitions with proposals and demands there. After that, people are invited to gather in another location on the outskirts of the town where a mourning celebration is due to take place," Karbalevich says.

The Chornobyl anniversary has taken on great political significance in Belarus. Because the disaster was covered up for days after it happened, it came to be seen as a symbol of Soviet mendacity, and later became a traditional day for rallies by the opposition.

On 26 April, however, the Belarusian opposition will not demonstrate — a fact Karbalevich says indicates that the memory of the public disaster is slowly fading.

However, Karbalevich says the tragedy remains a huge economic, social, political, and ethic problem for Belarus.

"The problem is not gone, it remains," Karbalevich says. "All negative consequences have not disappeared. It is possible to say that the problems are growing but the public is paying less attention to it. The state also is paying less attention."

Karbalevich says that recently, the government floated the idea of building a nuclear plant to become more independent from Russian gas supplies. This kind of discussion was impossible several years ago.

Source: RFE/RL Belasrus and Ukraine Report, April 26, 2005

HISTORICAL DATES

July 3, 1802
Ihnat Damejka (Domeyko), a Chilean geologist, traveler and educator was born near Karelіčy in western Belarus.

He studied at Vilnia University. After participating in the anti-Russian uprising of 1830-31 he moved to France and graduated from the School of Mining in Paris.

In 1839 the government of Chile invited Damejka to the post of professor at the University of Santiago. Soon he was elected the rector of this institution and occupied this position for 15 years.

He conducted many geological and geographical expeditions in the Pacific coast region, where he also discovered deposits of saltpeter and other minerals..

Damejka was the first to introduce the metric system of measurements in Latin America and was the founder of Chile's meteorology. He was the author of many books on Chile's geography and geology. After him were named: a mountain range, the mineral *domeykit*, and several Chilean cities.

Thoughts and Observations

A Partisan Reality Show

By Vitali Silitski

The greatest challenge to Lukashenka's almost Stalinist version of World War II may lie in simply representing Belarusians as ordinary people desperate for peace.

If anyone thought Russia's celebration of the World War II victory anniversary was an ideological showcase, they should look at Belarus. Red flags everywhere. Pompous military parades so numerous that that easily outscore those from the Soviet era. Giant billboards with cut-outs of military decorations on all main buildings. Veterans from all over the former the former empire. Speeches and proclamations reciting the slogans of 1941 verbatim. Celebrations of Victory Day in Belarus are often described as the best indicator of how far the former Soviet republic is returning to the past. The reality is that it never really left the past.

NO BELARUSIAN OTHER THAN A SOVIET BELARUSIAN

Without World War II – the Great Patriotic War, as Belarusians know it – it is utterly impossible to understand Belarus, the mentality of its people, and the politics of the state. There are numbers that will never evaporate from the collective memory. More than 2.5 million Belarusians perished in this war – every fourth Belarusian. Some estimates even suggest every third resident died. This is more than French, British, and American casualties combined. Six hundred villages were burned, together with their residents; life never returned to 200 of them. An entire country – that is, every single major city – was left in ruins. The population returned to its pre-war level only in the mid-1970s. This horror of war transformed and created 'the Belarusian mentality' as it is known today: ingrained in the collective psyche is a deep, subconscious fear not just of war but of any conflict. "At least, there is no war" is a typical reaction of a typical Belarusian to a typical day-to-day hardship. "As long as everything remains quiet" is a typical thought about the future.

But the public memory stores and succors figures not just of death and destruction. Over 300,000 guerillas, known as partisans, who took to the forests to fight Nazis. Two-thirds of Belarusian territory under guerilla control for most of the war. Heavier German casualties than on the entire western front (at least, that is what official historians claim). And innumerable names of defiant heroes immortalized ever since, names such as: Kanstancin Zaslonau, organizer of the 'railway war' that cost the Germans a gigantic amount of ammunition and manpower; Marat Kazei, a 13-year-old who blown himself up with a grenade rather than be captured by the enemy; and Minaj Shvyrou, 'Father Minaj', commander of partisan units, whose four children were taken hostage and executed after their father refused to turn himself in. Innumerable poems and novels studied at high school, movies and documentaries watched on TV, obelisks

in every town and village – all these tributes to the war are kept alive not only the memory of fear, but also pride.

This fear and pride has become crucial in forming what some historians and political scientists refer to as the "Soviet Belarusian nation." For a multitude of historical reasons, Belarusians, unlike most of their neighbors, never succeeded in developing a strong sense of national identity. Domination by external powers, centuries-old policies first of Polonization, then of Russification, left the collective memory without a sense of the past. The Soviet regime filled that gap with its own ideology, mixing the communist doctrine with the heroics of the guerilla resistance during World War II. According to one scholar of Belarus, Kathleen Mikhalisko, "resistance fighters and Red Army liberators filled the role of the missing popular heroes of Belarusian history, and that, in turn, abetted the process of forging a strong national identity at the mass level."

Seen from the official point of view, the communist regime gave Belarusians everything. It created their state in 1919 (**Editor's note:** in response to the declaration of independence of the Belarusian Democratic Republic which took place in March 1918), in the form of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Belarus. It unified Belarus in 1939. It saved the nation from annihilation by the Nazis. And it rebuilt the republic afterwards into the most prosperous part of the Soviet Union, giving Belarusian their golden age in 1965-80, under the rule of party leader Piotr Masherau (Masherov).

Masherau was an immensely popular and charismatic personality, a man who himself had been a guerilla and was awarded the star of a Hero of the Soviet Union at the age of 26. He is still revered by Belarusians for Belarus' unprecedented prosperity during the Brezhnev era. It was Masherau who transformed the partisan war into a national myth and made it a trademark by which Belarus is still identified – at least in the former Soviet Union. It was during his rule that some of the most gigantic World War II monuments emerged. These include an almost 200 foot high spear-headed man-made Mount of Glory on the outskirts of Minsk; an immense concrete monolith to commemorate the defense of the Brest Fortress; and perhaps the most human war memorial of all – a breathtaking architectural tribute to the villagers of Khatyn burned by the Nazis with their residents inside a barn. In the center of the memorial, there is a symbol of shocking simplicity and laconism: three birch trees, with an eternal fire instead of a fourth tree – a tribute to the one in every four Belarusians who died at war. (Human it may have been, but the memorial was also deeply political: this site to commemorate all the villages that perished in the inferno was chosen to be easily confused with Katyn, the site near Smolensk where Stalin's secret police, the NKVD, executed many thousands of Polish officers.)

"At least, there is no war" is a typical reaction of a typical Belarusian to a typical day-to-day hardship.

Architectural symbolism was augmented by the mass production of cultural testimonies. Belarusfilm, the local moviemaking company, was known in the former Soviet Union as Partisanfilm because of its endless output of war-related canvasses. War was the central theme of most literary production in the post-war republic. And the song of the best-known Belarusian folk-rock group, *Pesnyary*, created the image that instantly conjured up the republic in the minds of Soviet compatriots:

My youth – Byelorussia,
The songs of partisans – pine trees and fog.

WAR'S ROLE IN RECREATING EDEN

When the Soviet Union collapsed, it was for many Sovietized Belarusians as if they had been expelled from Eden. The Masherov-era prosperity and security collapsed all of a sudden, along with the entire world of meaning that cemented it. For many, the new life, with its turbulent politics and collapsing economy, could only be understood by what it was not: it was not what they were used to. It was simply inevitable that someone would exploit this confusion and anxiety to reap political benefits. That someone happened to be a 39-year-old head of a collective farm, a man known for the past decade as President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. Campaigning for power in his anti-corruption crusade, Lukashenka carried a simple and understandable message to the electorate: things went wrong because the Soviet Union was destroyed, and with it went the foundations of a good, simple, safe, and prosperous life.

Not only did Lukashenka play on the nostalgia for tranquility and security. To distinguish himself from his opponents, he exploited public memory and the only frame of self-understanding that ordinary Belarusians had to distinguish between what was good and bad. And so he initiated, in February 1995, his first referendum, to establish Russian as the second official language and to restore the Soviet-era flag and coat of arms as the country's official symbols. The independence-era symbols, the white-red-white flag and the Chase (Pahonya) coat of arms from the era of the Great Duchy of Lithuania were found guilty as charged: they were used by Nazi collaborators during the war. Ipso facto the opposition, which returned these symbols, was nothing but a collection of Nazi sympathizers. The referendum was held on 14 May, almost coinciding with the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the victory in World War II. Set against that favorable ideological backdrop, the proposal duly passed with ease, with 75% of those participating voting yes. Speaking about that occasion one year later, Lukashenka declared to his most loyal voters – war veterans – that "we have returned to you the flag of the country for which you fought. We have returned to you both memory and a sense of human pride."

In November 1996, Lukashenka repeated the trick when he tried to push through a referendum to disband the defiant parliament and institutionalize unlimited presidential rule. He added to that ballot a proposal to establish 3 July, the date on which Minsk was liberated from the Nazis in 1944, as the Belarusian Independence Day. The new official holiday replaced the Independence Day of post-communist Belarus, which was observed on 27 July to commemorate the adoption of the Declaration of Sovereignty in 1990. The

new official view was that 27 July was another leftover from the 'fascist' and 'nationalist' rule in 1991-93: it was, so the claim goes, deliberately chosen as the date for the Declaration of Sovereignty to coincide with the date in 1942 on which the Nazi governor of Belarus allowed the white-red-white flag and the Chase coat of arms to be used together with Nazi insignia. That was an outright lie: that decree was signed on 27 June. Still, Lukashenka had found another way to claim that the spiritual descendants of the Nazi collaborators put Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union on the same level.

Lukashenka recreated for Belarusians the symbolic and ideological atmosphere of the Marsherov era – adding to it a big-fingered pinch of Stalinism. The new independence holiday was celebrated with giant street fairs and gigantic military parades, which, in contrast with the late Soviet period but in keeping with Stalin's, included air shows and sportsmen's displays. (Later, he added one more element: a leader arriving in a generalissimo-style uniform, a uniform with no military rank attached but with regalia richer than that of any general.) 'Partisanfilm' was revived and once again ordered to produce war-related movies. Remarkably, the company's first product in post-Soviet era was the movie The Moment of Truth, which extolled the activities of the NKVD, Stalin's secret police, on recaptured Belarusian territory in 1944. A course entitled 'The Role of the Belarusian People in the Great Patriotic War' eventually became compulsory in the state curricula. Independence-era history textbooks were banned from schools and universities, and the 'correct' Soviet view on history was once again imposed by veteran ideologues who returned to prominence under Lukashenka's wing. Thinking about Belarus outside the confines of the Soviet version (and now Lukashenka's version) became a sign of sympathy towards Nazis.

This year, just before the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the victory in World War II, Lukashenka once again confirmed the centrality of the war in his ideology by bizarrely renaming the central streets in Minsk. The central avenue shed the name of Francishak Skaryna (printer of the first books in Belarusian, in the 16th century), and was renamed Independence Avenue (read: independence from Nazi occupants). Lukashenka even turned the avenue named after Masherau into Victors' Avenue, relegating Masherau to a new avenue formed from three old streets. (This decision seems particularly bizarre, since Masherau is firmly associated with the Soviet Belarus. It seems to be an attempt to downgrade his rival for public affection and a move that may have something to do with the emergence of Masherau's daughter as an outspoken opponent of Lukashenka's.)

Editor's Note: For the remainder of the article the reader is directed to Transitions Online : **www.tol.cz**

Source: Transitions Online : **www.tol.cz, May 11, 2005.**

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7 Revolutions in 2 Hours

By Alyaksandr Kudrytski

To Minsk's outrage and Moscow's unhappiness, the U.S., EU, and UN are taking direct aim at Lukashenka's regime.

MINSK, Belarus | President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's annual address to the Belarusian parliament on 19 April was not one of his more dazzling speeches. As he admitted, "there will be no resonant ideas." Instead, he said, "I will leave all grand and resonant ideas to the Third All-Belarusian Convention, which will be held at the beginning of next year."

All-Belarusian Conventions, which bring together handpicked representatives of different regions and strata of society, typically foreshadow major political campaigns by the regime. It will be no different in 2006, as Lukashenka will be running for a third term as president, a constitutional impossibility that became possible after a national referendum in October 2004.

In his two-hour speech, Lukashenka replaced grand ideas with a summary of economic successes over the past five years of his 10-year rule and objectives for another five years. But he struck perhaps the keynote of his speech when he lashed out at his enemies. He was not so much attacking as fighting back. "We are not pawns on a chessboard. Even a large one," he said in reference to a sharp increase in political pressure from abroad. "All these 'color revolutions' are not in fact revolutions at all. This is open gangsterism under the pretence of democracy."

Lukashenka did not name his enemies, but the list is getting longer. The United States with its Belarus Democracy Act, which was adopted last year, has been a constant source of very public displeasure for Lukashenka. (How much practical pressure it has exerted, though, is unclear; details of the president's bank assets have not yet been made public, as the writers of the act promised.) The UN and the European Union are rapidly catching up. In a report to the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva prepared in March, Special Rapporteur Adrian Severin concluded that Belarus is rapidly approaching a state of dictatorship.

The EU has gone even further. On 10 March, the European Parliament released a statement saying that the Belarusian regime should be denounced as dictatorial. European deputies called for the personal bank accounts of Lukashenka and other high-ranking Belarusian officials to be tracked down and frozen and for the EU to provide more effective support to Belarusian independent media and civil society. The head of the European Commission's delegation to Belarus, Ambassador Ian Boag, announced that the EU will use new financial mechanisms in its TACIS program to support transitional societies involving projects which currently have to be coordinated with the Belarusian government, leaving Belarusian non-governmental organizations at the whim of the authorities.

These moves are clearly upsetting Lukashenka. "There will be no money in Belarus that would help overthrow the current authorities," the president declared in his

speech. "None! Remember this. And let those who smuggle this money in bags, in suitcases, through embassies, hear this." It was not a warning diplomats to Belarus could have missed: they had been invited to attend the president's address to parliament.

When Lukashenka spoke about bags of money, he meant it literally. On 17 April, just one day before the presidential address, the government-controlled First National TV aired shots of two people, reportedly Lithuanians who had been arrested smuggling $200,000 into Belarus from Lithuania. The supposed recipient was Siarhey Skrabets, a member of "Respublika," the only opposition group in the former parliament. (There are none now.) Baltic News Service quoted an anonymous source in the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry, who called the incident a setup aimed both at the Belarusian opposition and Lithuania. The source said neither of the men arrested were Lithuanians, nor were they arrested in a train from Vilnius, as Belarusian television claimed.

THE LAST DICTATORSHIP IN THE HEART OF EUROPE

The day after his speech Lukashenka had even more reason to rail against his enemies. Although the U.S. has long criticized his regime, Belarus has not seemed to be high on the list of Washington's priorities. But that now seems to have changed. In January, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice listed Belarus alongside Burma, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, and Zimbabwe as an "outpost of tyranny." On 20 April, Rice took direct aim at the leadership of Belarus in a series of interviews and briefings for journalists. Belarus "is really the last remaining true dictatorship in the heart of Europe," she told CNN.

At the time of that interview, Rice was still in Moscow preparing the diplomatic ground for a visit to Russia by President George Bush. The next day she left for Vilnius, Lithuania, where, at talks with NATO foreign ministers, she met seven prominent representatives of the Belarusian opposition and civil society.

The selection was clearly aimed to provide Rice with opinions from a cross-section of Lukashenka's critics. The political opposition was represented by Alyaksandr Dabravolski, deputy leader of the United Civic Party. Hary Pahanyayla, a well-known lawyer, represented the human-rights sector. Zmitser Barodka from Free Belarus, a coalition of nongovernmental organizations, represented youth movements, and Svyatlana Kalinkina, editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Narodnaya Volya*, spoke for the independent media. The other three invitees were women's movement leader Liudmila Petina, Svyatlana Zavadskaya, wife of the television cameraman Dmitry Zavadsky who disappeared in 2000, and Anatol Mikhailau, the rector of the European Humanities University, which was shut down by the government in 2004.

Rice emerged from the meeting to list four preconditions for change in Belarus. First, support for the independent media. Second, political parties and civil society need to form a broad coalition. Third, Belarus requires a national protest movement. Finally, the opposition needs to choose a single strong presidential candidate.

The precision of Rice's recipe for change will do nothing to convince Russia (and Belarus) that the Secretary of State was sincere when, en route to Vilnius, she sent Russian authorities a message not to fear democracy. "I wanted to send a very strong message that the United States does not see developments in the former Soviet states, now independent states, as in any way anti-Russian or meant to diminish Russian influence," she told them.

Russia's foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, took this appeal skeptically. During the meeting with NATO foreign ministers in Vilnius, he stressed that Russia views as unacceptable any attempt at "forced changes" of political regimes. "Democratic principles cannot be developed from without," Lavrov said.

The reaction of Belarusian officials was sharper. "This is an appeal to overthrow the authorities in a sovereign state, this is a return to Cold War times," Mikalay Charhinets, head of the Commission on International Affairs and National Security in the upper house of the Belarusian parliament, told the Russian news agency Interfax.

The timing of Rice's statement meeting may also have been carefully planned. Andrey Sannikau, an opposition activist who was formerly deputy head of the Belarusian Foreign Ministry, told RFE/RL that "the fact that all this was said before [Lukashenka's] meeting with Putin, is not a coincidence – it means that this topic is being discussed between the United States and Russia."

UNION, IN A WAY

Rice's meeting with the Belarusian opposition came a day before a long-scheduled meeting between the Russian and Belarusian presidents, and may have prompted some changes in headlines for what would otherwise have been an ordinary meeting of the Upper Council of the Belarus-Russian Union, the top body of a semi-functional supra-governmental structure aimed at re-uniting Russia and Belarus. The BBC, for example, filed its report under the headline "Belarus thanks Putin for support."

Lukashenka's trip to Moscow did produce some caustic words. "I have no opinion about Rice or about her statements," Lukashenka said on arrival. "At least she now knows that Belarus really exists. Maybe she even knows where it is."

Notably, though, the meeting of the two presidents did not produce any joint direct riposte to the American political attack. At most, there was an indirect response when Lukashenka told journalists (before the meeting) that "Vladimir Vladimirovich [Putin] and I came to the conclusion that the construction of the joint state must receive a new impulse."

However, that assertion soon sounded a little hollow. Lukashenka and Putin signed 15 minor documents, but discussion of the major question – the creation of a monetary union – was again postponed, this time until November.

The problem for Lukashenka – and the opposition – is to judge how such words resonate in Belarusian ears. "Everything I say that looks forward to 2010 and even beyond

– none of that is useless," the president told parliament on 19 April. "Only the Belarusian people can derail us as we implement these goals. Nobody else." Although he denied any possibility of a regime change, **Lukashenka mentioned the word "revolution" seven times in his speech. It may, then, perhaps be an option that he cannot completely rule out. One thing seems certain: Belarusians will remember Lukashenka's words about revolution better than the list of economic successes he reeled off in his speech.**

Source: Transitions On Line, April 23, 2005
Alyaksandr Kudrytski is a TOL correspondent

Belarus in World War II: Collaborationists and Partisans

Within the framework of its "Belarus at War" series of programs before the 60th anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany in World War II, RFE/RL's Belarus Service on 28 March 2005 broadcast an interview with Valyantsin Taras and Jan Zaprudnik.

Valyantsin Taras (born in 1930) was an adolescent participant of the Soviet guerilla movement in Nazi-occupied Belarus in 1941-44, which has been glorified in Soviet historiography as a major contributor to the overall Soviet victory over Nazi Germany. Taras, who graduated from the Belarusian State University in 1955, is a Belarusian writer and translator (he published in both Belarusian and Russian) and lives in Minsk.

Jan Zaprudnik (born in 1926) attended two high schools opened under Nazi patronage in Belarus. Zaprudnik left Belarus in 1944, graduated from the Catholic University of Louvain (Belgium) in 1954, and obtained a doctorate in history from New York University in 1969. Zaprudnik wrote extensively on Belarus and spent 37 years with RFE/RL's Belarus Service as a correspondent, producer, and editor. His major publications include "Belarus: At a Crossroads in History" (1993) and "Historical Dictionary of Belarus" (1998). He lives in the United States.

The interview, which provides an insightful, nonstandard view of Belarus under the Nazi occupation, was conducted by RFE/RL's Belarus Service journalist Yury Drakakhrust. Below are translated excerpts from this program, by Jan Maksymiuk.

RFE/RL: Mr. Zaprudnik, some of those who collaborated with the Nazis have explained that by saying that they fought for Belarus' independence by taking advantage of the possibilities offered by the occupational administration to conduct Belarus-oriented work, no matter how modest those possibilities were. But because of that collaboration, didn't those people share responsibility for the Nazi terror, the Holocaust, the extermination of partisans, and punitive operations against civil population?

Zaprudnik: It's a very complex question. Speaking about the moral responsibility for collaboration with the Nazis, we need to take into account the entire historical context. Simultaneously we need to recall an axiom -- a man is morally responsible for his actions only if he has free choice. When we speak about life under the German occupation, I think that moral responsibility rests primarily with those who initiated the war — with Hitler in the first place. But let us also recall that Stalin was Hitler's de facto ally in 1939-40.

The category of collaborationists needs clarifications. A man was told during the German occupation: "Harness your horse up, you'll take [German] soldiers for a raid against [Soviet] partisans." Was there any real choice for him if he had only the two alternatives — either to obey or to get a bullet in his head? Only a few can choose a voluntary death. So the man harnessed his horse up and set off driving — and there you had a collaborationist.

There were thousands of such collaborationists. After the Soviets returned to Belarus, they drove all of them into the Gulag, including not only village heads and office clerks, but also cooks who earned bread for their families working at German kitchens. After the end of the war, the people who had been compulsorily moved to Germany were transferred to Siberia without a stopover [in Belarus]. My wife's sister-in-law, Khima, who had been taken to Germany as a girl, was sent to Siberia for 10 years without a stop in Belarus when she was returning home after the victory.

Speaking about collaboration, let us not forget about the sentiments of people who still had fresh memories of dispossession of the kulaks, the Stalinist terror of the 1930s, and deportations to Siberia from western Belarus in 1940-41. The issue of moral responsibility for people's actions under the German occupation is closely related to the issue of moral responsibility of Stalinist collaborationists for their actions under the Bolshevik rule.

I want to draw your attention to one more aspect — the moral responsibility of an older generation of Belarusians for bringing up the youth. It was unadvisable for Belarusian national activists to do nothing and wait for the Soviets' return. It was necessary to organize schools, prepare appropriate schoolbooks, open cultural institutions. The Soviet propaganda labeled all this as collaborationism with the Nazis (the Belarusian propaganda has been doing so until the present day). But teachers from my junior high school and commercial school in Baranavichy, who taught me math, the Belarusian language, and merchandising, were they collaborationists? My teachers in the junior high schools were two brothers, Anton and Yurka Lutskevich. The Bolsheviks starved their father, Anton Lutskevich, to death in prison. Had they to join the Soviet partisans or to look for some other way out during the military conflict between the Bolshevik dictatorship and the German fascism? They made a choice -- they put their stake on Belarus, which they wanted to see free and independent. This, too, was a moral choice, which cost each of them 15 years of slavery in Siberia.

All what I said does not discard the issue of responsibility for actions under the German occupation. Moral responsibility lies with those who killed innocent people, contributed to the Holocaust, burned villages, provoked the Germans into burning villages, moved civilians to compulsory work in Germany, robbed civilians, and acted as informers.

RFE/RL: The same question to you, Mr. Taras. Those people who collaborated with the Nazis for possibly higher purposes, for Belarus's independence — to what extent were they responsible for what was going on in Belarus?

Taras: I agree on many points with Mr. Zaprudnik. I agree that many ordinary people -- beginning with cleaning women and ending with school teachers -- were categorized [by the Soviet authorities] as collaborationists. My aunt was such a "collaborationist" -- she washed plates and bowls in a German canteen. My grandma, Hela, was such a "collaborationist" — she worked as a nurse's aid in a German hospital. Painter Mikalay Huseu, my father's close friend, was also such a "collaborationist." During the occupation Huseu lived on his profession — he painted portraits of German officers and fed his family with this job. After the war he got four years.

But we should not forget that there was ideological collaborationism as well. One thing was to command a police detachment while quite another was to teach in school under the occupation.

RFE/RL: Mr. Taras, we spoke about the responsibility of collaborationists, now I want to approach the issue from the other side. During the Nuremberg trials [Nazi ideologist and politician] Alfred Rosenberg said that partisans killed 500 village heads in Belarus in 1942. A lot of facts have been made known about how partisans killed those who collaborated with the Germans or those who were just suspected of such collaboration, how they killed teachers and confiscated food and livestock from peasants. There were murders and violence from one side, as well as murders and violence from the other side. So, why was one side better than the other? Can we speak about the responsibility for such actions of those who fought on the side of partisans?

"My aunt was such a 'collaborationist' — she washed dishes in a German canteen."

Taras: I won't deny that partisans committed violence -- they killed village heads, I personally witnessed such an execution in the village of Nyalyuby in Valozhyn Raion. But we need to remember one thing. The point is not in determining which regime, Stalinist or Nazi, was a lesser evil; there were no principal difference between them, both of them were the stones of the same mill that ground our people. At that time, however, the deep-laid character of war on occupied territories was determined not by Stalinism but by the people's resistance to the alien invasion, the people's struggle for their historical and physical survival.

Yes, partisans shot people to death, sometimes without any good reason, just because of suspicions. But not all partisans were responsible for that.

As regards food provision by partisans, I'll tell you one simple thing. Partisans were not a regular army, they were not provided with necessities under some centralized system. When your boots wore out, where could you get new ones? In a village, from a peasant. Partisans confiscated horses, cows, and pigs from peasants. In the eyes of an ordinary peasant, armed people who came at night to take his trousers, a pig, or a loaf of bread he kept for his kids, were nothing more than bandits.

Incidentally, there is a myth that has survived until the present day: So to say, there were partisans who derailed trains and fought Germans, and there were bandits who robbed peasants at night. They were the very same people. Bread did not grow for us on trees, and we could take new shoes only from peasants.

Zaprudnik: The problem of responsibility of ordinary people, such as Mr. Taras or I or our parents, is not appropriate [in this context]. We can speak about responsibility for atrocities, when [Belarusian] policemen killed Jews or resorted to violence. We need to take a broader historical and political context to look for those responsible. [Radaslau] Astrouski [head of the Belarusian Central Council, a self-governing body that collaborated with the Nazis in Belarus] can be regarded as responsible [for collaborationism]. However, Belarusian collaborationism did not have a theoretical foundation, like collaborationism in Petain's France. Petain's France put its stake on Germany as a future European empire and tried to secure a place for itself in the so-called "new Europe."

The Belarusian intelligentsia under the German occupation took care of the patriotic — one can say, nationalist — upbringing of the youth. We were nationalists in the positive sense of the word, we wanted freedom and independence for Belarus. It is possible to deny this argument by saying that there were no realistic prospects for such a desire to be fulfilled under the German occupation, but the desire was exactly like this — we wanted to see Belarus as an independent, self-ruling country.

Taras: I don't fully agree with Mr. Zaprudnik that many [representatives of the Belarusian intelligentsia under the Nazi occupation] were just nationalists. Healthy nationalism is a natural thing, I have nothing to say against it. In my opinion, many of them were simply Nazis. What they wrote [in Belarusian publications allowed by the Nazis] was Nazi propaganda, in the totally Hitlerite spirit.

There is a myth saying that had it not been for partisans, the Germans would not have touched us and would not have burned our villages. It is untrue. I remember how the Germans entered Minsk on 28 June 1941 and three days later herded several tens of thousands of people in a big camp on Shyroka Street and kept them there for 10 days without food and water. It was a particular selection, they wanted to shock people in order to suppress any thought of resistance in advance. I saw that with my own eyes.

RFE/RL: Mr. Zaprudnik, do you agree wit Mr. Taras' assessments? And a more specific question: In your opinion, to what extent was the partisan movement in Belarus inspired and organized by Moscow, and to what extent was the Nazi terror provoked by Soviet partisans?

Zaprudnik: The German terror had a theoretical foundation asserting that the Slavs were an inferior race, let alone the Jews, for whom the Germans developed a meticulous plan of their extermination.

As regards the nationwide resistance [to the Nazi occupation in Belarus], I would put a question mark over this issue. The memory of Bolshevik atrocities, deportations, the extermination of Belarusian national democrats, and forcible collectivization in the 1930s, were fresh during the oc-

cupation, and this memory partly motivated people for taking revenge during the war. So, the whole picture was much more complex.

Source: RFE/RL Belarus and Ukraine Report, May 3, 2005

Victory Day Events Shock Belarus

By David Marples

The 60th anniversary of Victory Day, commemorated on May 9, brought about two controversial and quite unexpected events for Belarus. The first was Belarus President Alexander Lukashenka's failure to appear at the grand celebrations in Moscow as anticipated. The second was the renaming of the two principal streets in the city of Minsk, without any debate and without the requisite prior permission from the Minsk city council.

That Lukashenka would appear at the parade in Moscow seemed a foregone conclusion. He had attended the 50th anniversary parade in 1995. On April 22, Mikalai Charhinets, head of the permanent commission of the Council of the Republic on foreign affairs and national security, noted the possibility that Lukashenka might even meet U.S. president George W. Bush while he was in Moscow. One week later, Uladzimir Hryhoryeu, Minsk's ambassador to Russia, told a press conference, "Lukashenka will definitely return to Moscow" after leading the Victory Parade in Minsk (*Narodnaya volya*, May 12).



Frantsishak Skaryna

Subsequently, the independent media in Moscow and Minsk have debated the reasons for his absence. The official reason provided was that Lukashenka decided to celebrate Victory Day with his own people. It is not a very satisfactory explanation, particularly when his Ukrainian counterpart, Viktor Yushchenko, found time to attend celebrations in both Moscow and Kyiv. One view is that the Americans requested that he not be present, as President Bush was unwilling to share a podium with "the dictator Lukashenka" (*Moskovsky komsomolets*, May 10).

The website of Charter 97 maintains that Lukashenka was "expelled from Moscow," citing a report from the *Financial Times Deutschland* newspaper that the Kremlin asked the Belarusian president to leave Moscow in order that President Bush should not be forced to stand alongside the man he had publicly censured (Charter 97, May 11).

Having resolved or been obliged to spend the day in Minsk, Lukashenka caused an uproar when he made a decision to rename several streets in the capital, most notably those of the two main thoroughfares, Skaryna Avenue and Praspekt Masherava. They were renamed respectively as Independence Avenue and Avenue of the Victors, on the grounds that the new names would help commemorate the major events of the war and the present. The names Skaryna and Masherau were reassigned to other, less prominent streets in Minsk (*Sovetskaya Belorussiya*, May 10).

The immediate reaction in Minsk was one of shock. Members of the Minsk City Council denied any knowledge of the name changes, and former minister of agriculture Vasil Lyavonau stated that the president wanted to erase the name of Piotr Masherau from popular memory, destroy the national consciousness of this period, and impose his own image on the people (*Narodnaya volya*, May 12). The daughter of former party leader Masherau, Natalya Masherava said that the decision had caused her extreme pain and that, in her opinion, Skaryna and Masherau were national and sacred names for the country. Her father, she says, did not deserve to be treated in this way, to be removed from history and public memory (*Narodnaya volya*, May 14).

Anatol Lyabedzka, leader of the United Civic Party, has proposed that the citizens of Minsk should express their anger at the violation of the law, the outrageous assault on memory and history, as well as the unnecessary waste of money involved in the name changes by holding a referendum on July 3, the national holiday (*Narodnaya volya*, May 14 and 19). However, in a sober assessment of the situation, Mikhail Lazavik, secretary of the Central Election Commission, noted that a group of 50 people would need to collect signatures from at least 10% of the electorate of the capital (120,000 people) and that the process would take at least four months, assuming that all the signatures were verified (*Narodnaya volya*, May 18).

Lukashenka's decree represents a grand gesture gone badly wrong. Communists have protested angrily at the assault on a national hero (Masherau), and the Lenin Young Communist League has organized a series of events across the country to commemorate the achievements of Masherau, including a conference, sports activities, and an essay writing contest among Belarusian students (Charter 97, May 20). However, the decision to remove the name of Frantsishak Skaryna is arguably more serious. It shows a shocking disregard for national history. Skaryna was a Renaissance scholar who translated and published the Bible into Old Belarusian, and he is one of the few figures from the Belarusian past to survive both Soviet and post-Soviet rewriting of national history.

The events of recent weeks have placed unprecedented pressure on the Belarusian president and, if he was indeed asked to leave Moscow, it signifies the further deterioration of relations with Belarus' closest ally and neighbor. Lukashenka clearly thought to deflect attention from his Moscow departure by equating his own term as president with the wartime victory. However, by removing the names of Skaryna and Masherau from the center of Minsk, he undermined his own strategy by offending those who revere past and recent national heroes of Belarus.

These are difficult days for Belarus' president and this latest empty gesture of making sudden symbolic name changes smacks of desperation.

Source: *Eurasia Daily Monitor,* May 23, 2005

Warsaw in Diplomatic Fight With Minsk Over Ethnic Group

By Jan Maksymiuk

A full-blown brawl flared up between Minsk and Warsaw earlier this month, with mutual diplomatic expulsions and a heated exchange of acrimonious accusations.

The clash is ostensibly centered on the Union of Poles in Belarus (SPB), which in March elected a new leadership that met with the disapproval of Belarusian authorities.

But the conflict has broader implications that could seriously affect bilateral relations on the EU's eastern border.

Polish media reported on 17 May that Marek Bucko, first secretary of the Polish Embassy in Minsk, has been declared persona non grata by Belarusian authorities. The report was not immediately confirmed by either the Belarusian Foreign Ministry or the Polish Embassy in Belarus, but *Sovetskaya Belorussiya,* the newspaper of the Belarusian presidential administration, wrote in its 17 May edition that "according to accounts by members of the Union [of Poles in Belarus], one of the employees of the [Polish] diplomatic representation, Marek Bucko, tried to direct the organization."

Polish Deputy Foreign Minister Andrzej Zalucki announced on 18 May that his ministry had decided to expel an unnamed counselor to the Belarusian Embassy in Warsaw in response to the Bucko expulsion. The same day, Belarusian Foreign Ministry spokesman Ruslan Yesin said Bucko was expelled in response to the expulsion of a Belarusian diplomat from Warsaw "several weeks earlier." That expulsion somehow failed to attract the attention of either the Polish or Belarusian media at the time it took place, according to Yesin. At the same time, Yesin said the expulsion of Bucko was also prompted by his "vigorous activities oriented toward the destabilization of Belarusian society."

Bucko's duties at the embassy in Minsk included contacts with Belarusian political parties and nongovernmental organizations, as well as with the SPB. On 12 May, the Belarusian Justice Ministry declared that an SPB congress in March was "non-democratic" and invalidated its decisions, notably the election of a new leadership. "The attack on the Union of Poles in Belarus [following its March congress] was very brutal," Bucko told Polish media on 18 May. "Delegates to the congress have been seriously pressured, threatened with layoffs from their jobs, called for interrogations, and intimidated. All this was done for the sole purpose of keeping Mr. Tadeusz Kruczkowski in the post of SPB chairman." At the SPB congress in March, Tadeusz Kruczkowski was replaced by Andzelika Borys.

In an unprecedented step in the history of Polish-Belarusian relations, Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski appealed on 19 May to the European Union for help in protecting the Polish minority in Belarus. Polish Foreign Minister Adam Rotfeld then said on 20 May that Warsaw had given Minsk a chance to reverse its decision on the SPB congress. "We created a chance for Belarus to reverse its decision and restore the legally elected authorities of the SPB," Rotfeld said. "If the Belarusian court takes such a decision, then we shall consider the matter closed. If there is an escalation, it will only be to the detriment of Belarus." The Warsaw-based *Zycie Warszawy* on 21 May published a purported list of a dozen Belarusian citizens who will be barred from entering Poland in connection with the conflict around the SPB congress. The list reportedly includes several SPB activists who support the Belarusian authorities' position in the conflict, as well as Belarusian Justice Minister Viktar Halavanau.

The Belarusian independent weekly *Nasha Niva* commented last week that the conflict around the organization of ethnic Poles in Belarus is essentially a clash between a group of SPB loyalists to the regime of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka (led by former SPB Chairman Kruczkowski) and a democratic wing of minority activists headed by a new SPB chairwoman, Andzelika Borys. The Belarusian regime, *Nasha Niva* argued, is going to stifle not only all political dissent but also any sprouts of civil society or pro-democracy activism in the country, and minority organizations are no exceptions in this drive.

The Belarusian government has launched a media campaign apparently intended to discredit the new SPB leadership in the eyes of the 400,000-strong Polish minority. Earlier this month, Belarusian Television showed a 40-minute documentary presenting the conflict around the SPB conflict as provoked by machinations from abroad, while the Polish-language weekly *Glos znad Niemna* in Hrodna, evidently inspired by the authorities, issued a special edition with materials discrediting Andzelika Borys and her associates in the SPB.

That something unpleasant is brewing in Polish-Belarusian relations became apparent during President Lukashenka's annual address to the nation on 19 April, when he slammed Poland for what he suggested was working to stage a revolution in Belarus, similar to the Orange Revolution in Ukraine. "I want to forewarn the Polish Embassy -- please don't take this as a threat," Lukashenka said in that address. "We know what's going on in your embassy, we know about your work. Don't think that Poles in Belarus are not Belarusian citizens. They are our citizens. We will see that no harm comes to them, and you will not bamboozle them either."

"You see, today they are working on what we will be doing in 2006," Lukashenka went on. "Ukraine is forming camps — as if to say, 'we will send you revolutionaries from there.' The Poles are working in the western part [of Belarus], including through the Roman Catholic Church, but not much comes out of it. [Those] Catholics are our Catholics. We do not suppress them. We have known since long that you will be pressuring this part of the population in order to destabilize [the situation]."

Lukashenka's ire over Warsaw's clout among Belarus' Polish minority — whose cultural and educational activities are generously sponsored by the Polish government -- might not be the only, or even the main, factor behind the current diplomatic row. Polish lawmakers in the European Parliament, along with their Lithuanian colleagues, have

been trying vigorously for months to persuade Brussels to launch and finance radio broadcasts into Belarus from neighboring countries. If they succeed, the information blockade imposed on Belarusians by the Lukashenka regime might be somewhat eased. This cannot but disconcert Lukashenka ahead of the 2006 presidential election in Belarus.

Calls in Poland for taking a tougher stance toward the Lukashenka regime are now being heard primarily from the political center and right. Poland will hold parliamentary and presidential elections this fall, and all opinion surveys predict that the Democratic Left Alliance, which now runs the government, will lose ground in both votes to centrists and right-wingers.

It will therefore come as little surprise if the currently sour relations between Minsk and Warsaw continue to curdle after the likely installation of a new government in Poland later this year.

Source: RFE/RL Belarus and Ukraine Report, May 27, 2005

The Union State of Russia and Belarus:
The popular will of two peoples, Or a creeping annexation ?

By Walter Stankievich

Nearly ten years have passed since that day in Kremlin when Boris Yeltsin and Alexander Lukashenka toasted their agreement to form a Union State. Since that day the integrationist process has witnessed many ups and downs, ranging from festive declarations to abusive recriminations from both sides.

Recently this long-suffering process has been given a new impetus following the dramatic loss of Russia's influence in the 'near abroad.' The proposed Union's budget has been tripled, and there is an apparent determination on part of Russia not to lose Belarus, its nearly last ally. The danger for Belarus to be, in effect, annexed by its fifteen- times larger, historically expansionist neighbor has rapidly increased.

Pavel Borodin, the State Secretary of the proposed Union State has stated: "The recent series of meetings between the Russian and Belarusian presidents has demonstrated...our overwhelming support for interstate **integration into a united country.** Issues like a united currency, Union property and united customs services are likely to be resolved, **before the year is out.**"

A number of influential Russian political analysts have joined in.

Sergei Markov, Director of the Institute for Political Studies: "Relations between Russia and Belarus have been greatly stimulated by processes outside of both of these states."

"This gave new impetus to integration...**If Lukashenka's dealings with Putin result in securing a place for the Belarusian elite in the new state, Russia and Belarus will definitely become a unified state. The decision may have been made already."**

Alexei Arbatov, a longtime East-West analyst, member of Russia's Science Academy: "After the defeat in Ukraine, **Belarus has become doubly important for us from the point of view of communications, defense and access to the Kaliningrad enclave** (on the Baltic sea) ...Lukashenka is not Kuchma (the beleaguered former President of Ukraine), and he will suppress any expressions of protest, especially by young people."

Mark Urnov, President of Ekspertiza Foundation: "The project of the Union State of Russia – Belarus **prepares the ground toward the establishment of a new state, thus extending the terms of office for all incumbents.** This is a project oriented for year 2008 (**Editor's note:** Putin's term expires then. Since Lukashenka expects to win in 2006, he expects to drive a hard bargain before 2008).

Both Belarus and Russia now lack in democratic expression that might prevent their current leaders to complete their devious means of staying in power. Of course, there is a matter of popular referendums, both in Belarus and in Russia that might be required to approve the formation of the Union State. Lukashenka has learned how to win all elections and referenda, and Putin may not need to resort to electoral control, since he will most likely have the enthusiastic support from the Russian people, anxious to reverse the downward spiral in Russia's influence in the region and the world.

So, rather than the popular will of both peoples, the Union State will mean the loss of sovereignty through annexation for Belarus, and the loss of democratic development for Russia through a new cycle of aggressive expansion. Will the sad history of the 20th century be repeated as a result of cynical machinations of two new near-despots?

Belarus as a "Dry-land Aircraft Carrier"?

By Aleh Hruzdzilovic, Miensk

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov and President Lukashenka met to discuss military issues in Minsk. Lukashenka believes that both countries need a mighty shield against the West. Also on the leaders' agenda, according to independent commentators, is the task of making Belarus a Russian "land-based aircraft carrier" directed against Europe.

A joint meeting of the ministries of defense of Belarus and Russia took place on April 20, 2005 in Minsk. The meeting was attended by Ivanov and his Belarusian colleague Leanid Malcau. Sergei Ivanov also discussed with Lukashenka the strengthening of the joint [Russo-Belarusian] grouping of military forces. "I do not say we will have a war with anyone tomorrow, but we should act in such a way that no one would want to wage war on us", said President Lukashenka at the meeting (Interfax news agency report).

Russia and Belarus already have a joint military understanding, they jointly control the airspace in the west, the Russians use military bases on Belarus' territory, free of charge. What further development of military co-operation can be expected?

Officially, it is reported that Russia will sell to Belarus at cost a sufficient number of S-300 anti-aircraft missile complexes to equip three missile battalions. This will ensure state-of-the-art anti-aircraft capability against an attack from the west. Information on what kind of Belarus-produced weaponry and technical products might be supplied to the Russian army is not readily available. Alexander Alesin, an independent military commentator, however believes that such prospects exist. "In my opinion," he stated, "there exists on the Russian side interest in Belarus-manufactured military components. Next year, Russia will start full production of the new missile complexes Topol-M, which rely entirely on tractors produced by a plant in Minsk. Russians tried to manufacture their own specialized tractors, their industrial lobby pressed for that, but nothing came of it. Russian leadership was unsure whether to commission another country to produce a component for strategic weapons. But after the recent meeting between Lukashenka and Putin in Sochi, Putin apparently gave the go-ahead. Russia will need several hundred of these complexes, they have not yet decided on the final figure, but certainly not less than 300-350."

According to Alesin, an equally important contribution to the Russian defense capability will be Belarus' provision of military airbases for Russia's Tu-160 aircraft. This aircraft is considered to be the biggest missile carrier in the world. It carries 12 strategic cruise missiles. Alesin points out that if such missile carriers are able to take off from airfields in Belarus, the range of their weapons will immediately expand to almost 600 miles, thus bringing Great Britain and western France within range. According to him, this factor significantly increases the value of Belarus as an ally to Russia.

"It seems," stated Alesin, "that Belarus has become a kind of dry-land aircraft carrier. A network of airfields for capable of handling strategic bombers and missile carriers now appears to exist. During the recent military exercises, Tu-160 and Tu-95 came to Belarus. One may add that during the Soviet era there were no facilities in Belarus capable of accepting the Tu-160. Now, however, since they did come to Belarus – it seems that such capabilities have appeared since."

Source: RFE/RL Belarus Service
Translated from the Belarusian original by Mikalaj Packajeu

QUOTES of QUARTER

"It is totally unacceptable that ten million people still live under dictatorship in the country bordering the European Union."

Paul Nyrup Rasmussen, President of the Party of European Socialists, June 8, 2005

NEWS BRIEFS

The source of items in the NEWS BRIEFS section is the RFE/RL Newsline, unless otherwise indicated.

1. REPRESSIONS

April 12, 2005
PRIVATE BELARUSIAN NEWSPAPER, EDITOR HIT WITH DAMAGES FOR LIBEL.

A district court in Minsk on 11 April awarded 10 million rubles ($4,500) in damages against Iryna Khalip, deputy editor of the privately owned *Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta* newspaper, and 50 million rubles ($22,500) against the newspaper for defaming Arkadii Mar, editor of the New York-based newspaper *Russkaya Amerika*, BelaPAN reported. Mar, whose newspaper reportedly comes out twice a year and focuses on Central Asian dictators, interviewed Lukashenka in mid-February and vowed to devote 12 pages in a special edition to the Belarusian leader. Khalip ran a story in late February claiming that the aim of interviewing Lukashenka was to cheat money out of the Belarusian authorities by exploiting their desire for positive coverage in the foreign press. Khalip wrote that Lukashenka was the third state leader to be cheated in that fashion. The judge rejected a defense request to ask the U.S. Embassy in Minsk whether Mar is actually the editor of *Russkaya Amerika* and refused to hear Khalip's arguments in the case.

April 14, 2005
BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION PARTY ORDERED TO RELOCATE HALF ITS BRANCHES.

The Belarusian Supreme Court on 13 April rejected an appeal by the United Civic Party (UCP) objecting to a warning it received from the Justice Ministry over its failure to meet a 1 February deadline for relocating its branches from residential to office buildings, BelaPAN reported. None of the country's political parties have managed to fulfill this requirement of the Housing Code, which came into effect in 1999. UCP party leaders said they will meet within days to discuss how to prevent the closing of the 75 party chapters that violate the Housing Code. Last month, UCP leader Anatol Lyabedzka submitted his application declaring his intention to seek the presidency in 2006.

April 18, 2005
BELARUSIAN SUPREME COURT ORDERS CLOSURE OF INDEPENDENT POLLSTER.

The Belarusian Supreme Court ordered on 15 April the closure of the Independent Institute for Socioeconomic and Political Research (NISEPI) for alleged repeated violations of laws, such as failing to provide its questionnaire forms to the authorities and using an office different from its legal address, Belapan and Interfax-Belarus reported. After the hearing, NISEPI Director Aleh Manayeu told reporters in Minsk that the court's decision is "politically motivated" and is part of the authorities' preparations for the 2006 presidential elections. Last year, NISEPI cooperated with Gallup/Baltic Surveys on an exit poll that suggested authorities rigged the referendum to lift the constitutional two-term limit on the presidency and allow President Alyaksandr Lukashenka to remain in office. Institute directors said in a statement that as long as they are "at large," they will continue their

mission to "contribute to the development of democracy, market economy, and civil society in Belarus by conducting sociological surveys."

April 17, 2005
BELARUSIAN POLICE DISPERSE RALLY ON CHORNOBYL ANNIVERSARY.

Riot police dispersed a demonstration staged by several hundreds of Belarusian opposition activists as well as youth-movement activists from Russia and Ukraine in downtown Minsk on 26 April, the 19th anniversary of the Chornobyl nuclear disaster, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. The demonstrators wanted to hand a petition to the Belarusian presidential administration requesting that the authorities report on what they are doing to solve the Chornobyl-related problems and that they stop producing food in areas contaminated by radiation. According to an official report, police arrested five Ukrainians, 14 Russians, and 13 Belarusians during the rally.

April 12, 2005
RUSSIANS, UKRAINIANS, BELARUSIANS SENTENCED FOR ANTIPRESIDENTIAL RALLY IN MINSK.

Belarusian courts on 27 April punished five Ukrainians, 14 Russians, and eight Belarusians who were arrested the previous day for their participation in an unauthorized rally near the presidential-administration building in Minsk, ITAR-TASS reported. According to the agency, the Russians were jailed for terms varying from five to 15 days. BelaPAN reported that they include a reporter of the Russian edition of *Newsweek* (10 days) and a correspondent of *Moskovskii komsomolets* (eight days). Meanwhile, the Ukrainians were jailed for terms varying from nine to 15 days, Ukrainian and Belarusian news agencies reported. RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported that two Belarusians, Zmitser Dashkevich and Syarhey Lisichonak, were jailed for 15 days and 10 days, respectively, while Maryna Bahdanovich, head of the Minsk branch of the opposition United Civic Party, was fined some $2,000. Ukraine's Foreign Ministry has issued a statement saying that the Belarusian authorities violated the 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations and the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms by denying opportunities for proper legal defense to the Ukrainian detainees.

May 10, 2005
BELARUS GRANTS EARLY RELEASE TO 14 RUSSIAN DEMONSTRATORS.

The Minsk City Court on 30 April ruled to release the 14 Russians who were detained at an unauthorized antipresidential rally in Minsk on 26 April and subsequently punished with jail terms varying from five to 15 days, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and Belapan reported. The court ruling followed an appeal by Russian Ambassador to Belarus Aleksandr Blokhin, which was broadcast by the NTV channel on 29 April. "This fact once again shows Belarus' readiness for the further strengthening of allied relations with Russia," Belarusian Foreign Ministry spokesman Ruslan Yesin commented upon the release of Russian demonstrators. ITAR-TASS reported the Russians left on 30 April on a train to Moscow without any marks in their passports banning future admission to Belarus. Meanwhile, five Ukrainians arrested at the same rally remain in jail in Minsk. The Minsk City Court is reportedly due to reconsider their fate on 2 May. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk said on 1 May that the refusal to free the five Ukrainians reflects Belarus' "special attitude" to Ukraine, and added that Belarus "gives more attention" to relations with Russia, according to Interfax.

May 10, 2005
JAILED UKRAINIANS IN MINSK FACE DEPORTATION, FIVE-YEAR ENTRY BAN

Five Ukrainians jailed by the Belarusian authorities for their participation in an unauthorized opposition demonstration in Minsk on 26 April face deportation and a five-year ban on reentering the country, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and BelaPAN reported. The embassy added that it is preparing, jointly with a lawyer from an international human rights association, a complaint against the Belarusian Interior Ministry's deportation and entry ban order. One of the five Ukrainians, Oleksiy Panasyuk, who was sentenced to nine days in jail, was reportedly released on 5 May after serving his term and deported to Ukraine. Three of his colleagues were sentenced to 10 days each, and another to 15 days.

May 11, 2005
POLICE DISBAND RALLY PROTESTING NEW STREET NAMES.

Some 40 young opposition activists staged an unsanctioned demonstration on 10 May in downtown Minsk to protest the recent renaming of streets in the Belarusian capital by President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, BelaPAN reported. Police dispersed the rally and detained eight demonstrators for a short time for identification. Lukashenka decreed before the 60th anniversary of the 9 May victory over Nazi Germany that Frantsishak Skaryna Avenue, Minsk's main thoroughfare, be renamed Independence Avenue, and that Pyotr Masherau Avenue, another major street in the capital, take the name of Victors' Avenue. The Belarusian president at the same time ordered that the names of Frantsishak Skaryna Avenue and Pyotr Masherau Avenue be ascribed to other streets in Minsk.

May 11, 2005
FORMER BELARUSIAN DISSIDENT LAWMAKER ARRESTED

Syarhey Skrabets, a member of the dissident Respublika group in Belarus' Chamber of Representatives from 2000-2004, was arrested in Minsk on 15 May by men who introduced themselves as officers of a department for combating organized crime, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and BelaPAN reported, quoting Skrabets's wife. Skrabets is reportedly suspected of giving a $30,000 bribe to an official in Brest, southwestern Belarus. Skrabets was transferred from Minsk to Brest on the same day, and searches were conducted in both his and his parents' apartment. Belarusian Television reported on 17 April that Belarus' law-enforcement agencies have detained a Lithuanian citizen who reportedly delivered $200,000 to finance Skrabets's political activities. Skrabets later commented to BelaPAN that the report was stage-managed by the KGB to embroil him into a trumped-up criminal case. In October 2004, Skrabets asked Moscow for asylum, arguing that he was threatened with imprisonment for opposing Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's regime. The Russian presidential administration has reportedly denied political asylum to him, saying that Russia does not offer asylum to citizens of countries with which it has no border or visa controls.

May 14, 2005
BELARUSIAN KGB TO CONDUCT HOUSE SEARCHES WITHOUT WARRANTS

Last week a law came into effect in Belarus allowing the State Security Committee to conduct searches in private apartments and offices of public organizations, including foreign ones, without search warrants from prosecutors, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported on 24 May. The law obliges KGB officers to notify a relevant prosecutor about a search within 24 hours after it took place. Another novelty in the law is the provision allowing the KGB to plant secret agents in any organization in Belarus. Those exposing such agents to the public will face imprisonment of up to five years.

May 31, 2005
TWO BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION POLITICIANS SENTENCED TO THREE YEARS.

A district court in Minsk on 31 May sentenced opposition leaders Mikalay Statkevich and Pavel Sevyarynets to three years of "restricted freedom" and corrective labor each, finding them guilty of organizing a series of demonstrations against the official results of the 17 October 2004 constitutional referendum and parliamentary elections, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. Statkevich and Sevyarynets will automatically have their terms shortened by one year under the amnesty law that took effect on 6 May. The verdict means that both politicians will have to live in a prison facility, work for a specified enterprise or organization or find a job in a designated area, and report to the prison administration at an appointed time every day. "This is political revenge," Statkevich said about his sentence. He had planned to take part in the 2006 presidential election campaign as a candidate. "I think the authorities are striving to restrict the freedom of all those who are able to lead people into the streets," Sevyarynets told RFE/RL.

June 10, 2005
BELARUSIAN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER FINED, FACES ANOTHER HEAVY FINE.

A district court in Minsk on 9 June ordered the independent daily *Narodnaya volya* to pay 15 million rubles ($7,000) in damages to six persons who denied signing a statement in support of the Will of the People opposition movement, whose lists of signatories were published by the newspaper earlier this year, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. Alyaksandr Kazulin, leader of the Will of the People movement, suggested that the authorities might have pressed the claimants to sue *Narodnaya volya* in order to cripple the newspaper with damages. Next week, the same court is scheduled to hear another libel suit against *Narodnaya volya*" in which Liberal Democratic Party head Syarhey Haydukevich is demanding some $93,000 in damages from the daily.

June 13, 2005
BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION POLITICIAN SENTENCED TO 1 1/2 YEARS.

A district court in Minsk on 10 June sentenced opposition activist Andrey Klimau to 18 months in a correctional-labor colony, finding him guilty of disturbing the public peace during an opposition protest he organized in Minsk on 25 March, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and BelaPAN reported. The previous day, Prosecutor Vadzim Paznyak demanded that Klimau be sentenced to three years in a high-security prison with no right to amnesty. Klimau admitted his role in organizing the 25 March demonstration but denied the accusation that the protest impeded traffic and the operation of governmental agencies. Klimau is facing another trial, as he is accused of defaming President Alyaksandr Lukashenka in three books and a leaflet. Klimau already spent four years in prison from 1998-2002 on charges of embezzlement and forgery, which were widely believed to be politically motivated.



Andrey Klimau

June 15, 2005
BELARUS'S ONLY OPPOSITION DAILY HEAVILY FINED, AGAIN.

A district court in Minsk on 14 June ruled that *Narodnaya volya*, the country's only nationwide opposition daily, must pay 100 million rubles ($46,500) in damages to Liberal Democratic Party leader and lawmaker Syarhey Haydukevich for allegedly defaming him in an article published in March, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and BelaPAN reported. The article suggested that Haydukevich was involved in the illegal sale of Iraqi oil under quotas received from the regime of Saddam Hussein. The story included a photocopy of a 2002 fax message to Haydukevich saying that he owes $1 million to the Iraqi Oil Ministry. "The verdict was induced solely by the wish to close the newspaper," Belarusian independent press editor Pavel Zhuk told RFE/RL. "I think hard times are coming for the nonstate press." Last week *Narodnaya volya* was fined $7,000 in another libel sui. In March and May 2004, *Narodnaya volya* was fined $7,000 and $23,000, respectively, in two separate libel cases.

2. PROTEST ACTIONS

April 29, 2005
JAILED BELARUSIAN, UKRAINIAN DEMONSTRATORS IN MINSK GO ON HUNGER STRIKE.

Zmitser Dashkevich, Kiryl Shymanovich, and Syarzhuk Vysotski from Belarus jointly with Ihor Huz, Andrey Bokach, Oleksandr Hrymalyuk, Oleksiy Panasyuk, and Oleksandr Mashlay from Ukraine went on a hunger strike on 28 April in the detention center on Akrestsina Street in Minsk, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. The group was detained during an antipresidential demonstration in Minsk on 26 April and sentenced to jail terms the following day. Kyiv has officially accused Minsk of violating the 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations and the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms by denying opportunities for proper legal defense to the Ukrainian detainees. Ukrainian Consul in Minsk Vasyl Serdeha met with the jailed Ukrainians on 28 April. Activists of Ukraine's National Alliance youth movement picketed the Belarusian Embassy in Kyiv on 28 April and reportedly presented the mission with a textbook on human rights and a basket of oranges, symbolic of last year's Orange Revolution in Ukraine.

May 18, 2005
ARRESTED BELARUSIAN OPPOSITIONIST GOES ON HUNGER STRIKE.

Former Belarusian dissident lawmaker Syarhey Skrabets, who was detained in Minsk on 15 May , has gone on a hunger strike in a jail in Brest, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported on 17 May,

quoting Skrabets' wife. "He refused to eat as soon as he was transferred to Brest [from Minsk on 15 May]," his wife, Alyaksandra Skrabets, told RFE/RL. Prosecutors in Brest have opened a criminal case against Skrabets, accusing him of attempting to offer a bribe. Last month, Belarusian Television reported that Belarus' law-enforcement agencies have detained a Lithuanian citizen who reportedly attempted to deliver $200,000 to finance Skrabets' political activities, but the case has thus far not been pursued. In June 2004, Skrabets and two other lawmakers went on a three-week hunger strike, demanding democratic changes to the country's Electoral Code and the release of their political associate, Mikhail Marynich



Siarhey Skrabets

May 26, 2005
JAILED BELARUSIAN OPPOSITIONIST GOES ON HUNGER STRIKE.

Mikalay Statkevich, who is on trial in Minsk with another opposition activist on charges of organizing unsanctioned protests in the wake of the constitutional referendum on 17 October 2004 went on hunger strike on 25 May, protesting the conditions of his incarceration, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. Statkevich was jailed for 10 days on 24 May after he refused to reply to questions during his trial and to stand up when the judge entered the courtroom. "There are five more people in my cell," Statkevich told RFE/RL. "One of them is suffering from dysentery. His condition is very bad, but [the jail administration] does not want to hospitalize him.... I have the impression that this sick man is being used as a bacteriological weapon to apply pressure on me, to make me change my behavior under the threat of infection."

May 27, 2005
BELARUSIAN STUDENTS GO ON HUNGER STRIKE OVER EXPULSION OF COLLEAGUE.

Four activists from the opposition Youth Front on 25 May went on hunger strike in a private apartment in Zhodzina, 60 kilometers east of Minsk, demanding that the administration of a local vocational school reinstate one of them, expelled after police arrested him during an antigovernment protest in Minsk on 26 April, BelaPAN and Charter 97 (http://www.charter97.org) reported. Dzmitry Chartkou, Alyaksandr Vinahradau, Yauhen Valkavets, and Syarhey Murashka have appealed to the Zhodzina City Executive Committee's Education Department, the Zhodzina City Council, and the Zhodzina Polytechnic School that expelled Murashka. "It is good that people at such an age begin to realize what is taking place in the country," Unite Civic Party activist Maryna Bahdanovich, who visited the protesters in Zhodzina, told RFE/RL's Belarus Service. "But on the other hand, it's terrible and nightmarish, and cynical [from the authorities], since they [protesters] are actually children." Meanwhile, former dissident lawmaker Syarhey Skrabets, who was arrested on 15 May continued a hunger strike for the 12th consecutive day on 26 May, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported.

June 7, 2005
BELARUSIAN STUDENTS END HUNGER STRIKE OVER EXPULSION OF COLLEAGUE

Eleven young people in Zhodzina on 6 June ended their hunger strike against what they call the politically motivated expulsion of their colleague, Syarhey Murashka, from a local vocational school, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and BelaPAN reported. The local authorities did not reinstate Murashka but promised not to take any further action against two other students, who had reportedly been facing expulsions from another local school.

June 14, 2005
BELARUSIAN OPPOSITIONIST CONTINUES MONTH-LONG HUNGER STRIKE OVER HIS ARREST.

The opposition United Civic Party (AHP) on 10 June appealed to dissident former lawmaker Syarhey Skrabets to end his hunger strike in a jail in Brest, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. Skrabets, who was arrested on 15 May on charges of attempted bribery, on 10 June entered the 30th day of a hunger strike over his arrest, which he deems politically motivated. "Your health and strength are necessary not only for your family but also for all of us.... We will see changes [in the country] without sacrifices and extreme measures," the AHP said in the appeal.

3. WORLD'S FOCUS ON BELARUS

April 15, 2005
UN REITERATES DEMAND THAT BELARUS ALLOW ENTRY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ENVOY.

The UN Human Rights Commission, meeting in Geneva on 14 April, asked Belarus to agree to a visit from a special UN envoy to investigate numerous allegations of human rights violations, Reuters reported. According to the news agency, the commission expressed "deep concern" that senior government officials had been implicated in the disappearances of three political opponents in 1999 and a journalist in 2000. The resolution was supported by the EU, United States, and Ukraine but opposed by Russia and China. Last year, the United States and the European Union co-sponsored a similar resolution, which raised concern about the disappearance of political opponents, electoral irregularities, and the beating and detention of demonstrators and journalists after the October 2004 parliamentary elections .

April 21, 2005
POLISH SPEAKER BLASTS BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT'S 'SCANDALOUS' STATEMENT

Sejm speaker Wlodzimierz Cimoszewicz said on 20 April that Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's reference to Polish diplomats in his 19 April address to the legislature was "scandalous," RFE/RL's Belarus Service and Polish media reported. "The form was scandalous, the wording devoid of any sense, speaking rudely. This is a statement of an irate dictator, displeased with the fact that not everyone in his country is scared," Cimoszewicz said. The previous day, Lukashenka told Belarusian legislators that diplomats of the Polish Embassy in Minsk are carrying out "destructive work" in western Belarus, including through the Roman Catholic Church, and putting pressure on Belarus' ethnic Polish community. "This is typical of nondemocratic systems that have internal problems and start looking for

enemies outside," Polish Foreign Minister Adam Rotfeld commented to *Gazeta Wyborcza* on 20 April.

April 22, 2005

WASHINGTON TO WATCH OVER 2006 ELECTION IN BELARUS

U.S. State Secretary Condoleezza Rice discussed Belarus with EU Foreign Policy and Security Chief Javier Solana, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Antanas Valionis, and members of Belarusian civil society in Vilnius on 21 April, an RFE/RL correspondent reported. "The point was made very clearly that the 2006 [presidential] elections really do present an excellent opportunity for the international community to focus on the need for free and fair elections in Belarus," Rice told a news conference following her talks. "The Belarusian government should know that their behavior is being watched by the international community, that this is not a dark corner in which things can go on unobserved, uncommented upon, and as if Belarus were somehow not a part of the European continent."

May 9, 2005

U.S. PRESIDENT, IN RIGA, URGES FAIR ELECTIONS IN BELARUS...

Speaking at a news conference in Riga on 7 May, U.S. President George W. Bush denied a suggestion from a journalist that Washington and Moscow may be seeking a deal to oust President Alyaksandr Lukashenka in Belarus, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service and Belapan reported. "The only deal that I think is a necessary deal for people is the deal of freedom. They should be allowed to express themselves in free and open and fair elections in Belarus," Bush said. "All of us are committed to the advance of freedom in Belarus," Bush went on to say. "The people of that country live under Europe's last dictatorship, and they deserve better. The governments of Latvia and Lithuania have worked to build support for democracy in Belarus, and to deliver truthful information by radio and newspapers. Together we have set a firm and confident standard: Repression has no place on this continent. The people of Minsk deserve the same freedom you have in Tallinn, and Vilnius, and Riga."

May 9, 2005

...AND IS MET WITH LUKASHENKA'S BLUNT RESPONSE.

President Lukashenka on 7 May warned the Baltic states against what he called interfering in Belarusian affairs, BelaPAN reported. Lukashenka was referring to talks between Bush and the three Baltic presidents in Riga earlier the same day, which touched upon the situation in Belarus. "I believe the Baltic states have enough problems of their own that could be discussed with their [American] boss," Lukashenka said at a meeting with veterans in Minsk. "It's good that they talk about us. We're glad if someone of them has studied a map and showed their overseas boss where Belarus is located. We welcome such discussions, but I fear any other sort of talk will end badly for the leaders of the Baltic states."

May 16, 2005

U.S. CONGRESS GRANTS $5 MILLION FOR DEMOCRACY DEVELOPMENT IN BELARUS IN 2005.

The U.S. Congress has passed a bill appropriating $5 million to be spent on developing democracy in Belarus in 2005, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported on 13 May. Under the bill, the U.S. State Department will spend $2.5 million to back political parties and the other half to sponsor independent media and nongovernmental organizations in Belarus.

May 17, 2005

LITHUANIAN PRESIDENT NOTES BELARUS'S ABSENCE AT COUNCIL OF EUROPE SUMMIT.

Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus said at a Council of Europe summit in Warsaw on 16 May that Belarus remains "a gray zone on the map of European democracies," BNS and PAP reported. "One European country [Belarus] is missing today. The country whose citizens believe in the principles of the Council of Europe but who cannot enjoy them in practice," Adamkus said. "The Alyaksandr Lukashenko-led regime continues isolating itself from the free European family and democratic values, isolating Belarus' people at the same time," Adamkus added.

June 2, 2005

WASHINGTON DECRIES SENTENCES AGAINST BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEADERS.

The U.S. Embassy in Minsk expressed "grave concern" on 1 June over the sentencing the previous day of Belarusian opposition leaders Mikalay Statkevich and Pavel Sevyarynets to three years of restricted freedom and corrective labor for their roles in protests that followed October's "deeply flawed election and referendum", according to the embassy's website (http://minsk.usembassy.gov). The embassy recalled that Statkevich and Sevyarynets have already been convicted and served jail terms for the same offenses. "Convicting Statkevich and Sevyarynets a second time for exercising their internationally acknowledged rights of expression and assembly is a travesty of justice and a clear abuse of the courts for political purposes," the embassy said, calling on Belarusian authorities to release both convicts immediately. EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana said in a statement the same day that "even by the standards of Belarus, this is an excessive penalty" for "nonviolent democratic activity."

June 7, 2005

FORMER CZECH PRESIDENT FORMS GROUP TO SUPPORT BELARUSIAN NGOS

In the Czech Senate on 6 June, a group of former Czech dissidents led by ex-Czech President Vaclav Havel presented a new organization they set up last week — the Civic Belarus International Association, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. The association was set up to provide support to Belarusian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that have faced official pressure or have been closed down by the authorities. Aside from Havel, the founders of Civic Belarus include Czech senators Jaromir Stetina and Karel Schwarzenberg, former Senate Deputy Chairman Jan Ruml, Deputy Ombudsman Anna Sabatova, and head of the People in Need Foundation Tomas Pojar.

4. POLITICAL OPPOSITION

April 11, 2005

BELARUSIAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATS ELECT NEW LEADER.

A conference of Belarusian social democrats on 10 April created the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Hramada) by merging two opposition parties, the Belarusian Social Democratic Assembly (BSDH) and the Belarusian Social Democratic Party-Popular Assembly (BSDP-NH), Belapan reported. The conference elected Alyaksandr Kazulin, former rector of Belarusian State University, as the new party's chairman. "I'm firmly determined

to change the situation in Belarus for the better," Kazulin pledged. Kazulin, who has stepped into the political arena only recently, is widely regarded as a possible contender for the post of president in 2006. Shortly before the conference, 36 delegates of the BSDH dismissed their leader, Stanislau Shushkevich, and decided to dissolve the BSDH and join the new party that was founded on the basis of the BSDP-NH. Shushkevich has reportedly protested the merger, arguing that the decision was taken against the BSDH statute. The 10 April conference was held in the open air in the village of Sennitsa in Minsk Oblast in front of a local cultural center. The delegates were not let inside the building despite having already paid rent for the space.

April 25, 2005
ANOTHER BELARUSIAN HOPEFUL MAKES PRESIDENTIAL BID.

Alyaksandr Vaytovich, former president of the Belarusian National Academy of Sciences (1997-2000) and chairman of the Council of the Republic (upper house of Belarus's National Assembly) from 2000-03, told Belapan on 24 April that he intends to run in the country's 2006 presidential election. The 67-year-old Vaytovich said there are several reasons behind his decision to vie for the presidency. "Firstly, this is the state of affairs in all spheres of the country's life, which are increasingly affected by Alyaksandr Lukashenka's dictatorship," Vaytovich said. "Secondly, I receive a lot of appeals from representatives of various groups of our society. And thirdly, I have experience of service at different levels with many organizations, including national ones." Meanwhile, regional conferences of opposition groups and non-governmental organizations in Mahilyou on 23 April and Hrodna on 24 April threw their support behind Alyaksandr Milinkevich, one of the leaders of Belarus' third sector, as their choice for a joint presidential candidate to be proposed for approval by a congress of democratic forces later this year, BelaPAN and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported.

May 26, 2005
BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION ACTIVISTS TO CAMPAIGN FOR LOCAL REFERENDUM.

Some 500 opposition activists will collect signatures in support of a plebiscite on street renaming in Minsk, Belapan reported on 25 May, quoting Syarhey Kalyakin, leader of the Belarusian Party of Communists. Kalyakin's party has recently joined other opposition parties in a campaign to initiate a referendum in Minsk against President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's decree that ordered the renaming of the capital's main thoroughfares. The initiators of the plebiscite need to collect some 120,000 signatures in order to make it happen.

June 2, 2005
NEW ASPIRANT SEEKS BELARUSIAN PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION FOR 2006 RACE.

Alyaksandr Kazulin, leader of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party, has announced his intention to seek democratic forces' nomination to compete in next year's presidential election, BelaPAN reported on 1 June. In a letter to the Permanent Council of Democratic Forces, Kazulin suggests forming a broad national movement for democratic change by October, conducting an independent poll in November to assess public support for opposition presidential bidders, and holding what he calls a "Belarusian people's assembly" in December to elect a single democratic candidate to challenge President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. Kazulin said he wants to discuss his proposals with the leaders of "the real political parties," which in his opinion are the Belarusian Popular Front, the United Civic Party, and the Belarusian Party of Communists. Belarus' major opposition parties originally intended to select a joint presidential nominee by October. Eight others have already declared their intentions to vie for the nomination

June 8, 2005
BELARUSIAN UNIVERSITIES TO PAY FOR POLITICAL PERSECUTION OF STUDENTS

The Council of the human rights center "Viasna" has sent an open letter to the Education Ministry of Belarus, rectorates of the Belarusian State University and Belarusian State Pedagogical University, and the administration of the technical school in the town of Zhodzina.

"Severe censorship is being introduced in the universities, activities of independent students' organizations and students' self-government are forbidden, politicization of the educational process and ideological indoctrination are being implemented" stress the human rights activists.

The council of the human rights center "Viasna" warns the administrative divisions of these educational institutions that these actions are unacceptable, and call upon them to stop harassment of students for their political activities.

Otherwise the human rights center is ready to start a public campaign designed to terminate contacts of Europe's educational and scientific institutions with the directors of above mentioned Belarusian schools and with the Education Ministry of Belarus.

Source: Charter'97 Press Center, June 8, 2005

5. REGIME ACTIONS AND STATEMENTS

May 10, 2005
BELARUS CELEBRATES V-DAY WITH MILITARY PARADE...

More than 2,500 troops representing all branches of military service gathered under heavy rain to take part in a parade in Minsk on 9 May to mark the 60th anniversary of the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany in World War II, Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. The parade, apart from World War II-era hardware and weapons, also featured displays of modern military equipment, including tanks, infantry vehicles, truck-mounted and self-propelled antiaircraft and artillery systems, and military helicopters and airplanes. The military display was followed by a caravan of over 70 trucks, buses, harvesters and tractors, followed by flatbed trucks carrying household appliances and other equipment, in a show of Belarusian industrial accomplishments.

.May 10, 2005
..AS LUKASHENKA, ABSENT FROM MOSCOW SHOW, FLEXES MUSCLES

. Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka opened Minsk's 9 May military parade with a speech asserting that the Belarusian armed forces are capable of ensuring the country's safety and integrity, BelaPAN reported. "We are doing our utmost to ensure that the armed forces remain mobile and prepared to repel any aggression," he said. "Our people will never pose a threat to anyone, but they will always be able to defend their own freedom and independence." In an apparent reference to the United States' involvement in Iraq, Lukashenka decried "people...dying in terrorist acts, unprecedented in their brutality, in bloody interna-

tional conflicts caused by the geopolitical games of nations claiming global domination." Lukashenka was among the five presidents of post-Soviet states — along with those of Lithuania, Estonia, Georgia and Moldova — who did not attend the V-Day military parade in Moscow. Neither Minsk nor Moscow has offered an explanation for Lukashenka's failure to appear for the 9 May commemorations in the Russian capital.

June 3, 2005

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT RESTRICTS VOCABULARY FOR NAMES OF ORGANIZATIONS.

Alyaksandr Lukashenka has issued a decree limiting the use of the words "national" and "Belarusian" in the names of organizations, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported on 31 May. The word "national" may be used only in the names of government agencies, organizations whose property is owned by the state, and media outlets founded by the government. Political parties, national nongovernmental organizations, national trade unions, and banks are allowed to include the word "Belarusian" in their names, but not the word "national." Private media outlets are not allowed to use either the word "national" or the word "Belarusian" in their names. The decree orders the organizations and companies that do not meet the new requirements to apply for re-registration within three months.

June 3, 2005

MINSK DENIES VISA TO CZECH LAWMAKER.

Belarus has refused to issue a visa to Czech lower house Deputy Svatopluk Karasek, prompting the Czech Foreign Ministry to send a diplomatic note, CTK reported on 2 June. Karasek, a communist-era dissident and member of the underground band Plastic People of the Universe, wanted to perform with three other Czech lawmakers — who were granted Belarusian visas — at a concert to support the opposition in Minsk on 12 June. Karasek, who is also an Evangelical priest, reportedly wanted to sing his hit "Tell the Devil 'No.'" He is reportedly planning to send a tape with his song to the concert in light of the Belarusian authorities' move. Karasek visited Minsk in October, when he read a message from Vaclav Havel to an opposition rally following the controversial 17 October referendum and parliamentary elections.

June 30, 2005

BELARUSIAN LEGISLATOR PROPOSES FORCED STERILIZATION OF 'ASOCIAL' TYPES

Speaking in the country's lower house of parliament on 2 June, Chamber of Representatives deputy Syarhey Kastsyan suggested the enactment of a law to introduce forced sterilization for individuals "leading an asocial life," Belapan reported. People leading promiscuous sexual lives — who he claimed make up 1 percent of the population -- breed unhealthy children, "mostly idiots," leading to a gradual "'cretinization' of society," Kastsyan said. "Even animals are selective about mating." Kastyan added: "It is necessary to solve the problem in a drastic way. It is necessary to enact a law providing for forced sterilization, or else the state will not withstand this burden."

June 6, 2005

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT CONSIDERS INCREASING AIR FORCES TO FEND OFF 'ANTI-BELARUSIAN HYSTERIA.'

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka said at a fighter air base near Byaroza, Brest Oblast, on 3 June that Belarus may increase its military aircraft fleet in response to increased "anti-Belarusian hysteria" in neighboring countries and NATO's eastward expansion, Belarusian Television and BelaPAN reported. "We're considering very attractive offers for purchasing Su-30 planes for our armed forces," Lukashenka said. "A decision has been made to buy [Czech-made] L-39 fighter-trainers to train future pilots theoretically and practically on the territory of Belarus." According to Lukashenka, foreign countries may be harboring military-intervention plans against Belarus under the pretext of spreading democracy. "A great military potential is being amassed on Belarus' borders," Lukashenka said. "We have no right and we cannot light-heartedly ignore today's realities and real threats to [our] security."

June 10, 2005

BELARUS IMPOSES VISAS FOR GEORGIANS TO THWART 'ILLEGAL MIGRATION'...

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka on 9 June introduced visas for Georgians visiting Belarus, thus withdrawing Belarus from the CIS agreement of 1992 on visa-free travel, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and BelaPAN reported. Russia introduced visas for Georgians in 1999. "The Republic of Belarus, which is a party to the agreement on creating a union state [with Russia]...coordinates its foreign-policy positions on a bilateral basis, including in consular issues," Belarusian Foreign Ministry spokesman Ruslan Yesin commented on Minsk's move toward Tbilisi. "The lack of border and customs control on the Belarus-Russia border has provided an opportunity for Georgian citizens to use Belarus regularly as a transit country for illegal entrance into the Russian Federation. The number of such transgressions of the law is growing."

June 10, 2005

AS SOME SEE POLITICAL MOTIVES BEHIND MOVE.

Mikalay Charhinets, chairman of the commission for international issues in Belarus' upper house of parliament, told RFE/RL that the introduction of visas for Georgians was prompted by Tbilisi's political stance vis-a-vis Minsk. "Militant and hostile statements by Georgian President [Mikheil] Saakashvili [regarding Belarus] do not create prerequisites for eyeing one another with trust," Charhinets said. "It is a typical decision for an authoritarian regime and an authoritarian leader who thinks that there is the threat of a colored revolution from Georgia," commented the Georgian parliamentarian Konstantine Gabashvili.

June 17, 2005

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT CURBS OFFICIAL TRAVEL ABROAD

Alyaksandr Lukashenka has issued a decree stiffening the rules for state officials' trips abroad, the Moscow-based *Gazeta* reported on June 16. The document defines a group of officials who may travel abroad only with Lukashenka's permission. The latter group includes cabinet ministers, the head of the presidential administration, regional governors, the prosecutor-general, and the directors of organizations who were appointed by the president. An official trip abroad may not exceed two days; officials wanting to stay abroad longer need to provide justification, and a relevant decision is reportedly to be made "proceeding from official necessity and the need to maximally economize state funds."

Belarusians Abroad

Lavon Volski Performed in the United States

Belarusian rock-and-roll musician Lavon Volski, the leader of the group, NRM and organizer of the musical project KRAMAMBULA, staged a concert for the Belarusian-American diaspora in the state of Delaware.

This performance took place on March 15, 2005 in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware. The public consisted mainly of former Belarusian students now living on America's East Coast. For most of them the concert also provided a long awaited opportunity to meet old friends and make new acquaintances. Some drove over 14 hours from Florida and Georgia to hear their Belarusian rock-and-roll hero. As some admitted, attending Volski's concert became in a sense a patriotic duty. In an interview with the newspaper BIELARUS, Volski noted that while a large number of young Belarusians left their country, many of them remain and want to feel as Belarusians in their hearts.



Volski's fans in Delaware

The concert was made possible due to help from America's Belarusian diaspora, and especially due to the efforts of Mr. Andrej Labaj, a young music enthusiast from the state of Delaware.

Source: Newspaper BIELARUS, April 2005.

Freedom Day Observance in Germany

Members of the Union of Belarusians in Germany observed this year's Freedom Day - March 25 by picketing Belarus' embassy in Bonn. They came from Munich, Trier, Aachen, Frankfurt am Main, Herzogenrath, Landshut.

After 2 hours of picketing they placed in embassy's mailbox a list with over 70 names of regime's helpers from the Homiel region of Belarus: judges, prosecutors, officials of the "vertical" system. The list ended with words: **They Will Face the People's Judgment.**

Culture & Society

To Inspire Those Still in Search of Freedom

On June 5, 2005 the Czech Embassy in Belarus organized an exhibition of the works of Czech photographers dedicated to the events in Prague in 1968 (**Editor's Note**: Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia) and the "velvet revolution" in Czechoslovakia in 1989. Related events included a meeting with the noted Czech musicians, who are also parliament deputies, Tania Fischerova, Walter Bartos and Petr Bratsky.

It was not easy to organize these events in Minsk. First the Belarusian authorities had not allowed the Czech deputy Svatopluk Karasek to enter Belarus, and later the club "Gudvin", where a concert of the Czech deputies was to take place, was suddenly closed for a "clean-up day".

However, the event did take place. The exhibition was opened in the headquarters of the Belarusian Popular Front Party, and the concert was held in the building of the Embassy of the Czech Republic. Representatives of civil society of Belarus including heads of NGOs, other human rights activists and journalists attended the event.

Opening the exhibition, Czech Ambassador Vladimir Ruml expressed regret in connection with the refusal of the Belarusian authorities to issue visa to Czech parliament deputy Svatopluk Karasek. Mr. Karasek was last in Belarus in 2004 during the referendum and parliamentary elections. He was present at the protest meeting on October 18 in Minsk and read a message from the former Czech president Vaclav Havel, exhorting Belarusians to fight for freedom and democracy in their country. The activities of the election observers is believed to explain the denial of a visa for Mr. Karasek.

According to Mr. Ruml, the photo exhibition "shows the moments fateful for the society of Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic".

"I would like it not only to give pleasure to you, but to inspire those who still have little freedom," said the Ambassador.

At the concert the Czech deputies, who in the past participated in the resistance movement, performed songs which were popular among Czechs and Slovaks in times of Soviet invasion and occupation. Texts of some songs were written by Svatopluk Karasek.

As a sign of solidarity with Belarusians, at the concert Czech deputies were dressed in T-shirts showing the faces of "disappeared" Belarusian politicians and a journalist — Yury Zakharanka, Viktar Hanchar, Anatol Krasouski and Dzmitry Zavadski. A sticker "Free Belarus" was placed on the door of the Czech embassy.

Source: Charter'97 Press Center, June 6, 2005

MEDIA WATCH

PRESS REVIEW

Vice President Lukashenko (*Moscow Times*, by Pavel Felgenhauer, April 12, 2005) — Last week, President Vladimir Putin met his Belarusian counterpart, Alexander Lukashenko, for talks in the Black Sea resort town of Sochi. The meeting was officially described as routine. The leaders agreed that Belarus should continue to receive Russian gas at reduced prices and postponed the introduction of a joint currency based on the Russian ruble. However, an informed Kremlin source told me that the real progress was made behind the scenes.

Putin and Lukashenko apparently agreed on a joint strategy to prevent popular democratic revolutions from overthrowing their regimes. The Kremlin insider, speaking on condition of anonymity, told me that a tentative agreement has been reached that would drastically speed up the process of merging Russia and Belarus into a bastion opposing Western-sponsored democratic change.

In a year or so, a referendum will be held in Russia and Belarus to merge the two nations. The Russian Constitution will be rewritten, and the State Duma will be disbanded to create a new joint parliament. The countries' defense and foreign ministries will be merged. Putin will be re-elected sometime in 2007 for seven years to be president of the new joint nation with Lukashenko as vice president. Such a combination would solve the so-called problem of 2008, the need to replace Putin, whose second and last term as president under the current Constitution will soon end. Lukashenko will run with Putin as vice president, assured that the Kremlin will be his after Putin's seven-year term ends.

The merger with Belarus was always a high-priority goal for Putin, the first step in reuniting the former Soviet Union. Since 2000, Lukashenko has refused to give up his fiefdom, but now fear of regime change is driving the two leaders together, though they do not particularly like each other.

The concern in the Kremlin is genuine. In a recent interview, Putin chief of staff Dmitry Medvedev warned that the growing split within the Russian elite may destroy Russia. It is clear, though, that Medvedev was more afraid of regime change than of Russia's possible disintegration. It is also clear that Putin and his close cohorts have reason to be worried. The ruling elite is split today, and not in Putin's favor. Over the last year, discontent has spread rapidly, engulfing previously loyal parts of the bureaucracy. It's not well known to the general public, but no secret to insiders: The middle ranks of the military, security services and law enforcement are today disgusted with Kremlin policies and no longer support Putin's regime.

The reasons why different parts of the elite today loathe Putin are diverse. Liberals detest the dismantling of democracy. Journalists despise the shrinking freedom of the press. Businessmen are outraged by the ever-growing bribes they are forced to pay corrupt officials, and they are unnerved by the uncertain nature of property rights after the Yukos affair. Officers and security officials with nationalist leanings believe Putin has sold Mother Russia to the hated Americans by letting them occupy former Soviet Central Asia.

Corrupt middle-rank military, security and law enforcement officials detest the amount of money the Kremlin gang takes. As insiders, they know all too well that their superiors rake in hundred of times more in bribes than the rank and file. In 2000, Putin promised to restore the greatness of the Russian military, and defense spending has indeed grown substantially, but the only result has been grossly increased misappropriation.

Salaries of officers in the overstaffed military, security and police armies remain entirely inappropriate. Putin and his ministers apparently do not understand that when Kremlin-controlled propaganda trumpets another pay hike of several hundred rubles the penny-ante increase only causes more dissent.

As Medvedev made clear in his interview, Kremlin insiders feel their growing isolation. If the men with guns are increasingly disloyal, any serious crisis may, as in Kyrgyzstan or in Georgia, lead to sudden regime collapse. There will be no one willing to fight for Putin if some future stupid reform brings the masses onto the streets.

Enter Lukashenko, who built a loyal military in Belarus that is ready to batter dissenters anytime. During serious internal crises, Putin has tended in previous years to keep a low profile, but in the future, Vice President Lukashenko could step in, airlift his rogues from Minsk to Moscow and save the regime. This marriage of convenience may help Putin stay in power, while ending Lukashenko's present international isolation.

Pavel Felgenhauer is an independent defense analyst based in Moscow.

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"White Revolution" stirring in Belarus (*Washington Times*, by Jeffrey T. Kuhner, May 4, 2005) —"The winds of change are about to sweep across the plains of Belarus," begins the article. Ten years of rule under Lukashenko has had deleterious impacts on the nation concludes the author who states: Minsk, once the cradle of a brilliant, Slavic medieval kingdom and a major center of resistance to Adolf Hitler's invading armies, is now often derided by Western diplomats as resembling "East Berlin, without the charm." But, according to the article Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stated at a recent meeting with Belarusan opposition leaders at the NATO summit in Vilnius that "The Belarusian government should know that they are being watched by the international community, that this is not a dark corner in which they can [go] unobserved, uncommented on, as if Belarus is not a part of the European Continent."

The hope of Washington is described as the continuation of the trend set in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan and consistent with President Bush`s policy of spreading democracy. The article notes that brave democrats plan massive street demonstrations this fall in hopes of forcing Mr. Lukashenko's resignation. With strong American support, they may well unleash a "White Revolution" similar to the Rose and Orange Revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine.

What could hamper this evolution is however, Russia. Russian President Vladimir Putin is determined to not let Minsk go the way of Kiev and Tbilisi. His Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has said Russia will oppose any effort by the United States to undermine Mr. Lukashenko's government.

A lot is at stake for those who dream of a new Russian Empire and who profit by arms sales to rogue nations which thus makes Lukashenko "not only a menace to his own people, but to American security interests as well."

The article relates that: "In his recent address to parliament, Mr. Lukashenko denounced any peaceful efforts toward democracy as 'plain banditry.' He vowed they would not occur under any circumstances."

Jeffrey T. Kuhner is a historian and communications director at the Ripon Society (www.riponsoc.org), a Republican policy institute. The views expressed are solely those of Mr. Kuhner

LETTERS

Dear Mr. Arciuch:

Thank you for taking the time to write and for the material you enclosed. I appreciate your kind words and learning your views and suggestions.

I am humbled and honored to lead a proud Nation. Through courage, compassion, and strength, Americans are demonstrating the character of our country.

Our Nation faces great tasks, and we are meeting them with courage and resolve. My Administration is committed to continuing our economic progress, defending our freedom, and upholding our deepest values of family and faith.

Laura and I send our best wishes. May God bless you, and may God continue to bless America.

Sincerely,

George W. Bush The White House Washington, DC
March 1, 2005

Editor's Note: Mr. Arciuch is *Review*'s editor-at-large. This letter is in response to his February 15 letter to President Bush. The enclosed material mentioned in the President's letter refers to a copy of Arciuch's editorial, "Will Belarus Democracy Act Unseat Lukashenka in 2006 ?," that appeared in the winter issue of *Belarusian Review.*

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... Let me take the opportunity to compliment you on the *Review*. We remember from our Committee in Support of Solidarity days how important it is to maintain a truthful record as well as clear advocacy when so many are negative about democracy's prospects. You do both admirably.

Best wishes,

Eric Chenoweth
Co-Director,
Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe.

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The library of Sodertorns University in Stockholm now subscribes to *Belarusian Review*, and the 17-1 issue is already on the shelf.

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Andrej Kotljarchuk,
Researcher, Department of History

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